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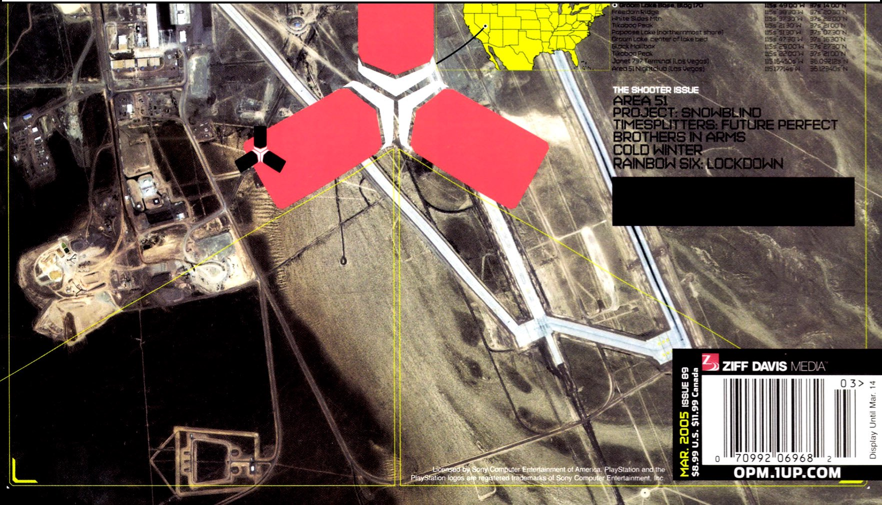
AREA 51

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 90 (March 2005)



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THE SHOOTER ISSUE

AREA 51
PROJECT: SNOWBLIND
TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT
BROTHERS IN ARMS
COLD WINTER
RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

[redacted]

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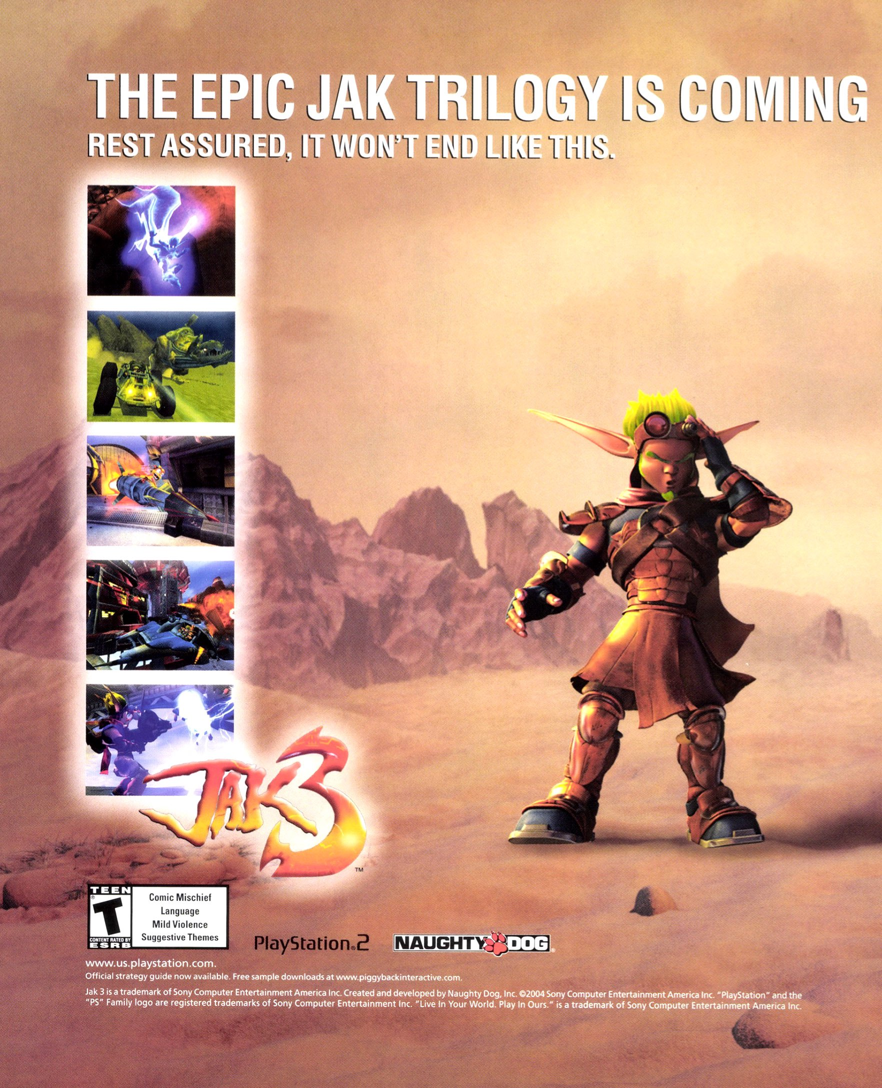
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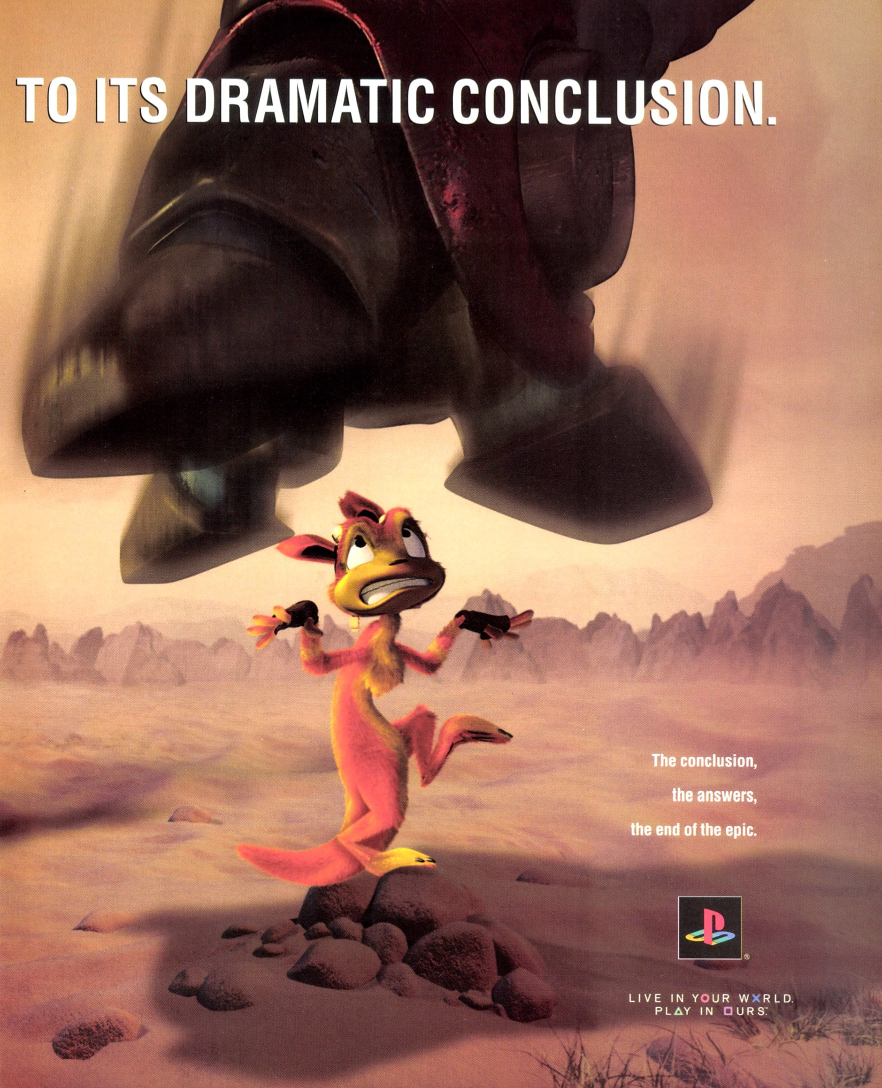
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TEEN
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Blood
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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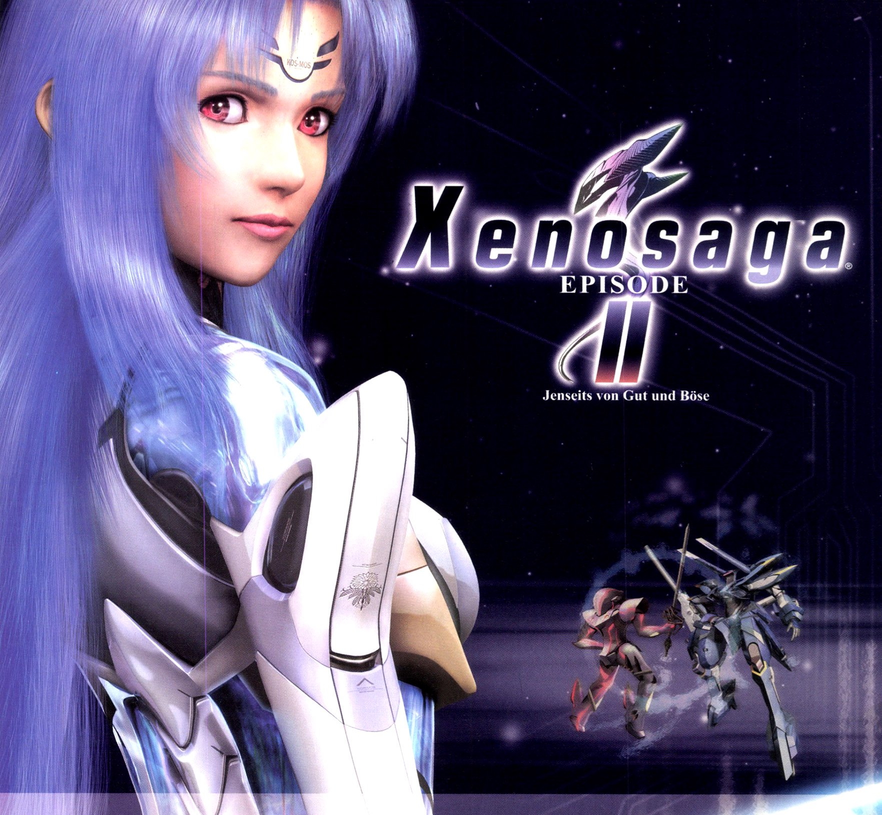
PlayStation®2



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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood and Gore
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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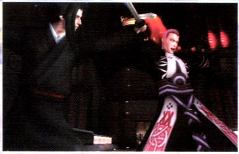

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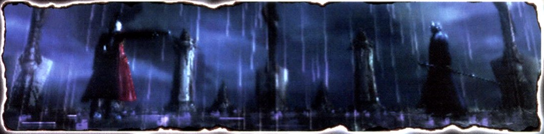

Dante confronts his twin brother **Vergil**

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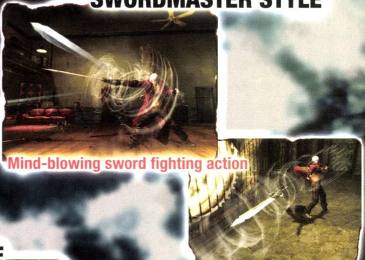

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Suggestive Themes
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PlayStation 2

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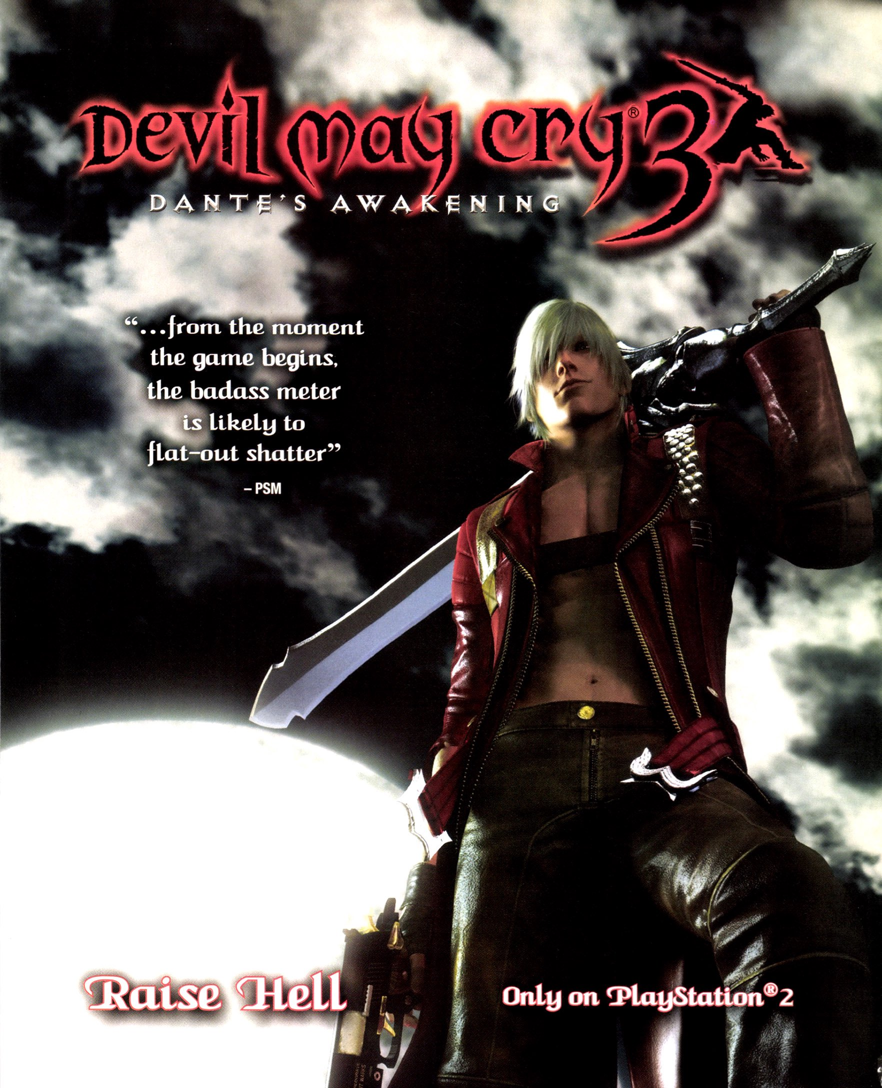
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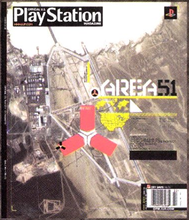
Satellite image courtesy of Space Imaging.

COVER STORY AREA 51

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INPUT

18 INPUT
People say we're crazy, we're sick and all alone, but when we read your letters, we're rolling on the floor—so write us at opm@ziffdavis.com

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NANO BREAKER

IT'S NANO BROKEN!

Someone should've told the *Nano Breaker* development team that the whole buckets-of-blood thing wore out its welcome in the late 1990s. It's the first thing that strikes you—or for that matter, any passing observer—about *Nano Breaker.* Every single slash produces what seems like fountains of blood (though the game doesn't really indicate that it's blood, we all know what it is; the game even keeps track of how many gallons you've spilled). While this effect produces the "wow, that's a lot of blood" reaction it's going for initially, there isn't enough blood in the universe to distract you from how utterly boring this game is.

Let's start with the environments. Someone thought it would be a good idea to have the game take place in a postapocalyptic industrial setting—you know, the kind that is usually monochromatic and sprinkled with an abandoned car here and there. Yep, and best of all, there are dozens of areas that look nearly identical, so you can have all kinds of fun wondering if you were in that same area just a few minutes prior. Sure, there's a map, but it often gives you only a vague idea of where you're supposed to go.

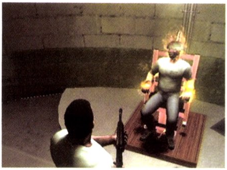
As for the combat, just imagine *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, but instead of an elegant, nonintrusive combination system, you have an overly complicated one. It's not only difficult to execute certain moves because of the often precise and awkward timing involved, but you also have to collect chips that you can use to unlock certain combinations depending on where you insert them in the combination tree. There's absolutely no need for this when the game is based on mostly mindless hacking and slashing.

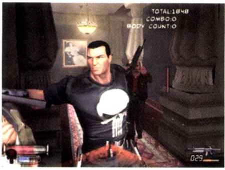
Again, the only things going for *Nano Breaker* are the visceral thrills of slicing limbs of nanorobots, nanodog-looking things, and an assortment of other nanotechnology, but beyond that, it won't be responsible for resurrecting the hack-and-slash genre. « Giancarlo Varanini

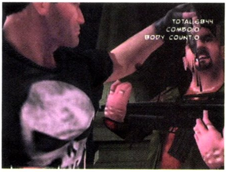
VERDICT Go play *Castlevania* instead.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Konami **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●◐○○]







PUNISHER

A BIT OF THE OL' ULTRAVIOLENCE

While Punisher has been around for 30 years, his game résumé is pretty sad. His NES game is as terrible as the story line in which he was an avenging angel wielding holy machine guns, while the PS2 version is a lot like the modern *Punisher* comics: surprisingly good.

As a game, *Punisher* might be considered the offspring of *Max Payne* and *Manhunt*—that is, it combines *Max Payne*'s third-person gunplay with *Manhunt*'s penchant for grotesque life-ending methods. These deaths come in two forms: quick kills and interrogations. A quick kill is a context-sensitive press of the Square button in which Punisher will instantly take out whoever is in front of him—these range from shoving flamethrower nozzles into mouths to using environmental hazards (such as planting someone's face in a bear trap). Interrogations involve gently rocking the analog stick back and forth to gain information; once it's gained, you can either let your victim go or proceed with the grisly death (such as stuffing him into a furnace or pushing his face into a piranha tank/deep fryer/vat of hot liquid steel). Finally, there's also the odd slaughter mode, in which everything moves fast and Frank can instantly murderize anyone with his bare hands (making it the opposite of bullet time, since everything's sped up instead of slowed down).

Contrasted with *Manhunt*'s death deliveries, which tend to fill you with discomfort and horror, Punisher's methods of killing enemies (and his one-liners) come off as darkly comic; I felt icky seeing *Manhunt*'s James Earl Cash stab someone in the eyes, but I actually laugh when I see Punisher stuff a grenade down someone's throat. I know it's wrong to laugh at a level where the Punisher smuggles himself into a mob funeral, rises from the coffin with M60 in hand, and guns down all the grieving attendees—yet I still do. While *Punisher* dangerously veers toward "meh" territory in terms of gameplay (due to its repetitive action, enemies, and levels), the jet-black humor and varied ultraviolence help it stand out—much like the comics now. « Thierry Nguyen

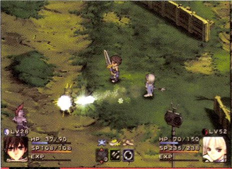
WELCOME BACK, FRANK Funny black-comedy script, varied kill animations and interrogations, fun nods for comic fans **ZOMBIE-PUNISHER WITH HOLY GUNS** Take away the above and it's just another third-person shooter

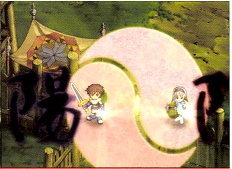
Pub. THQ **Dev.** Volition Inc. **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

PUNISHING HISTORY

Punisher first appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #129, which came out in February 1974. The best *Punisher* story that goes along with the game is "Welcome Back, Frank," the original 12-issue maxiseries by the *Preacher* team of writer Garth Ennis and artist Steve Dillon.





SHINING TEARS

A TALE OF TEAMWORK AND SLOWDOWN, SHOPPING AND SLASHING

A dragon, a ninja cat, and an amnesiac walk into a bar. Each orders up a stein of stale beer and sits in quiet reflection. After a long sigh, the amnesiac breaks the silence: "I gotta say, this game isn't as fun as I thought it'd be. The backdrops are gorgeous, of course. You guys know I love 2D. It's just, our story, it really only gets us from battle to battle—it's just nonsense. The player button-mashes through our lines now."

"Oh please," the ninja cat, already red in the cheeks, replies as she slams her empty stein on the bar. "I'll take a break from battle anytime. I thought the dual character thing was really cool—the tag-team attacks, the camaraderie—but the A.I. blows. I'm always lagging behind and rushing into mobs of enemies like an idiot." She pounds the sticky bar for another round.

"Well, I find the hack-n-slash quite palatable," the dragon, dressed in full armor, says as he swirls the beer in his stein. "Such a nice variety of specials and spells. Yet, I am troubled that as the enemy hordes grow larger, slowdown sets upon us like a barrel of horse glue. I have never heard the player utter such foul verbiage."

"We're booting up!" says the bartender, a shirtless blue wolf. "Find your mark." Characters scramble, but the ninja cat remains, obviously intoxicated. "Screw it. I'm sick of replaying old stages to level up. I'm sick of the monotony. Fight and shop. Retreat and resupply. I'm going to find the sequel." The ninja cat peels herself from the stool, takes a wobbly step, and falls flat on her face. « *Robert Ashley*

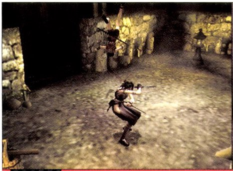
PROS Beautiful art, unique team mechanic
CONS Repetitious battles, poor A.I., slowdown

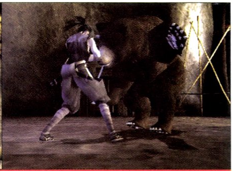
Pub. Sega **Dev.** Sega **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●●○○]

THE PLAYER 2

If you get tired of defending your A.I. partner in *Shining Tears*, plug in a second controller for real teamwork.





TENCHU: FATAL SHADOWS

NO NEED FOR TENCHU

If you spent the 2004 holidays bonding with *Metal Gear Solid 3*, your bar for stealth-action gaming has been irrevocably raised. One game to fall victim to Solid Snake's latest outing is undoubtedly *Tenchu: Fatal Shadows*. As one of the pioneer stealth-action games on the PS1, *Tenchu* hasn't aged well at all this generation, and *Shadows*' laundry list of flaws seals this franchise as a has-been from a bygone era.

Incomprehensibly bad narratives and awful voice acting are just the start. *Shadows* suffers from one of the most useless cameras since the advent of 3D gaming. Who cares that fatalities are now easier to pull off (and more stylish than ever) when every ounce of your concentration is spent struggling with a camera that insists on snapping back to front and center as soon as you let go of the right analog stick. This spells disaster for a stealth game that requires complete situational awareness.

Even if you are able to miraculously overcome the camera handicap, the game's dated graphics engine looks at best like a PSP title, and at worst like a sharper version of its PS1 counterpart. One mission briefing dutifully suggests that you "stay quiet like the shadows," but the game supports neither real-time light sourcing nor a system to keep track of incidental volume. If *Shadows* weren't such a last-ditch effort to squeeze out a final game from old, jury-rigged technology, we could have been graced with a real ninja swan song from what used to be a fine and intriguing franchise. « *Che Chou*

PROS Fatalities still give you the warm fuzzies
CONS Dreadful camera system and localization

Pub. Sega **Dev.** K2/From Software **ESRB** M **MSRP** $39.99

RATING [●●○○○]

PlayStation

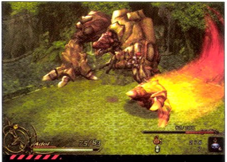
WATCH IT!

Want to see a gory collage of deadly fatalities from *Tenchu: Fatal Shadows*? Simply fire up this month's disc.

PlayStation

PLAY IT!

You too can experience a trip down old-school RPG memory lane by checking out the *Ys VI* demo on this month's disc.



YS VI: THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

IT'S PRONOUNCED "EASE"

I'll say this for *Ys VI*: It is not ashamed to be old school. *The Ark of Napishtim* is the first new entry in the classic action-RPG series since the days of the Super Nintendo, and it feels exactly like a 16-bit hack-n-slash with a modern (well, more modern anyway) face-lift. Neither spectacular magic spell effects nor extensive cinematic scenes get in the way of the action (although there is an impressive amount of voice-acted dialogue). Still, the classic formula might be a letdown for the post-*FFVII* generation.

Your objectives are simple—as red-haired swordsman Adol Christin, you traipse through towns and dungeons, talking up villagers and slashing up monsters. In battle, Adol can switch between different swords, each with unique attack characteristics and a powerful magic spell that can be unleashed every now and then. And that is the extent of his abilities besides some nifty jump-and-slash moves.

Unfortunately, swordplay skill just isn't that important. If a room of enemies is more powerful than you, you'll be killed instantly with no hope of squeezing through. But once you've leveled up to a certain strength (usually by sticking close to a save point and cautiously killing one enemy at a time), the dungeon becomes a cakewalk. Constantly alternating between being superweak and superpowerful gets annoying, especially since you often have to backtrack through old terrain to advance the story.

But what's even more tedious is when the game sticks you in front of a powerful boss character that you can't yet damage, but all the other enemies are so profoundly weak that you can't get more than a few paltry experience points out of them. And even worse are the jumping sections, which quickly become frustrating due to the game's imprecise controls. But these imperfections don't keep *Ys VI* from being fun and even a little addictive—it's still an interesting walk down memory lane for us twenty-something geezers. « *Chris Kohler*

SLASH Fairly good battle system, quality music
HACK Some awful jumping puzzles, unbalanced level-up system

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Nihon Falcom **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]

RAY CHARLES
THE GREAT RAY CHARLES
WHAT'D I SAY RAY CHARLES
Ray Charles
ray charle

RAY

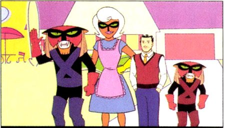
(Jamie Foxx, Kerry Washington)

OSCAR BOUND **by John Scalzi**

The smart money this year is on Jamie Foxx to win an Oscar for his performance in *Ray*, as the movie's title character, the late, great R&B master Ray Charles. Some of the reasons have little to do with Foxx's performance, per se: Charles died just prior to the release of the film, giving this portrait of the man an unexpected level of poignancy. Foxx himself has been previously known as a lightweight comedy actor, so this dramatic portrayal is the sort career-revising performance Oscar voters love (see also: Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*). And this is Foxx's second head-turning performance of the year, following his meaty role as a taxi driver in *Collateral*.

However, the main reason Foxx is tops on the odds list *is* his performance: Foxx digs deep to give a performance that doesn't just praise Ray Charles (which would be easy), but tries hard to make the audience understand Ray Charles (which is rather more difficult). Charles, like virtually every genius, was a driven, difficult, and egotistical person; on top of that, Charles had his demons, from childhood guilt to drug use. Foxx lays it all out there fearlessly, aided by Taylor Hackford's intelligent direction. It's not Ray Charles up there on the screen, but it sure feels like it, and that's worth ringing the Oscar bell for Foxx.

RATING [●●●●◐]



THE BRAK SHOW

(Andy Merrill, C. Martin Croker)

Personally, I think it's a sin against both God and nature that *The Brak Show* isn't making new episodes for Cartoon Network's Adult Swim, yet *Sealab 2021* keeps going strong. At least we have this collection, which features the misadventures of everyone's favorite stupid limited-animation sci-fi catlike space creature, Brak, and also everyone's favorite amoral mantis-shaped villain, Zorak, as they live, laugh, and learn in the suburbs. It's possibly a high point of our entire civilization.

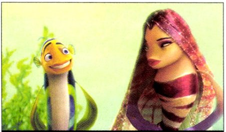
RATING [●●●●○]

THE GRUDGE

(Sarah Michelle Gellar, Bill Pullman)

Between this film and *The Ring*, there are at least four things we're learning about Japanese horror films being remade into American horror films: 1) The heroine of the American version has to be blonde; 2) it's not a good idea to be her boyfriend; 3) the film's embodiment of evil should have moist, unmanageable hair; 4) if you try to actually make sense of the plot, you'll mysteriously get a phone call telling you you'll die in seven days. I think that about covers it. So is this scary? Sure, a little bit. It has its moments. Just don't bother yourself with the story, though, because...hmmm, that's the phone. Excuse me.

RATING [●●●○○]



SHARK TALE

(Will Smith, Jack Black)

This is sort of what *Finding Nemo* would have been like if the folks at Pixar imagined New Jersey underwater (and were about half as clever as they really are). It's cute, and it's fun to see Will Smith in hustler mode, even when he's disguised as a dinky fish who acquires a false rep as a shark killer. But you can't shake the feeling that Dreamworks counted on people's affection for computer animation to get them over the rough spots in the story. That's not going to work much longer, folks.

RATING [●●●○○]

THE NOTEBOOK

(Ryan Gosling, James Garner)

This flick is based on a novel by romantic schlockmaster Nicholas Sparks, so all you "guy" guys should move along right now. For anyone who's left: This is date-film gold: a love story featuring two seemingly mismatched young people, told by the older version of one of them to the other. It is perfectly crafted to make you feel all gooey, and want to hold hands and take long strolls in the park with your beloved for the next 60 years. If you can stomach that sort of thing, you'll love it.

RATING [●●●◐○]

DVD RELEASES

February 1
The Brak Show: Season 1
The Grudge
Henry Rollins: Shock and Awe
Mr. 3000
Oz: Season 4
Penn & Teller's Bullsh*t: Season 2
Ray
Shall We Dance?
Wonderfalls: Complete Series

February 8
Miami Vice: Season 1
The Notebook
Shark Tale

February 15
Donnie Darko: Director's Cut
Saw

February 22
I (Heart) Huckabees
The Shield: Season 3
Stripperella: Season 1

I (HEART) HUCKABEES

(Jude Law, Jason Schwartzman)

Here's a film starring Jude Law and Naomi Watts as corporate tools, Mark Wahlberg as a fireman on a bike, and dueling existentialist investigators. In theory, this is a fun sort of setup, but practically speaking, it doesn't work. I imagine David O. Russell got this film made by exploiting the intellectual insecurities of film execs who didn't want to look like they didn't "get it." Well, I have a philosophy degree from the University of Chicago, and I get it well enough. It's just not that good.

RATING [●●◐○○]

SHALL WE DANCE?

(Jennifer Lopez, Richard Gere)

This is one of the few recent Japanese-to-English remakes that doesn't involve inscrutable curses, although it does involve J. Lo, which may be close enough. Keep an open mind anyway, since this is a fairly innocuous and mostly pleasant little comedy about a lawyer (Richard Gere) who decides to take dance lessons because he sees the dance instructor (Lopez) looking pensive in a window. And let's face it, if all it took for you to get next to J. Lo was dance lessons, wouldn't you do it?

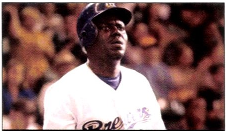
RATING [●●●◐○]

SAW

(Cary Elwes, Leigh Whannell)

There are few things I hate more than waking up in a bathroom, discovering I'm chained to a wall, and being told that unless I kill the other chained-up guy in the bathroom in a certain amount of time, my family will die. Thus is the premise of *Saw*, and there's lots of wild overacting and grisly scenes of horror to go with it. As exploitative horror thrillers go, it's pretty solid, although the ending doesn't really justify everything the audience is put through to get there. At least the trip is messy enough.

RATING [●●●◐○]



MR. 3000

(Bernie Mac, Angela Bassett)

This comedy is economical, since it combines the "come-from-behind baseball team" genre with the "selfish jerk learns to be nicer to people" genre: Bernie Mac is a Barry Bonds–like baseball player who discovers his 3,000-hit career is actually three short and dons his uniform again to get back to his magic number. It's nothing new, but Bernie Mac provides the right balance of jerk and hero, and any film that helps rescue Angela Bassett from the obscurity she's been in gets credit from me.

RATING [●●●◐○]

Buying a Video Game?

Play the game that's right for you!

You can give Tiger Woods a tennis racket, but he knows that golf is the game that's right for him. So how does Tiger know which computer and video games are OK to play? He checks the rating on every game box...And so should you!

Computer and video game ratings have two parts: **rating symbols**, which tell you what age group the game is appropriate for and **content descriptors**, which tell you about specific content elements that may be of interest or concern.

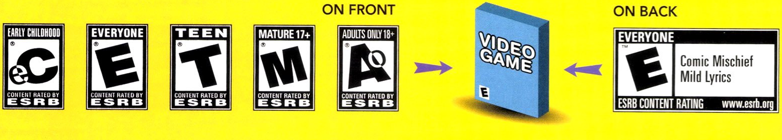
So the next time you're choosing a game, check the rating and the content descriptors. And like Tiger Woods, play the game that's right for you.

ESRB

ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE RATING BOARD

www.esrb.org

CHECK THE RATINGS ON EVERY VIDEO GAME BOX


EARLY CHILDHOOD
eC
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ADULTS ONLY 18+
AO
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
ON FRONT
VIDEO GAME
E
ON BACK
EVERYONE
E
Comic Mischief
Mild Lyrics
ESRB CONTENT RATING
www.esrb.org

REPLAY

114>

SOCOM II

A REPRISE OF STRATEGIES FOR ALL THREE DOWNLOADABLE MAPS

PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIMA
Prima Games, leading publisher of gaming guides, provides *OPM* with top-of-the-line strategies every month.

In this issue, Prima's strategy gurus share their expertise by providing some particularly dirty *Need for Speed Underground 2* multiplayer tips.

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We take a look at the scads of minigames in *San Andreas*.

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Nasty little tactics for taking out your friends in multiplayer.

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Jeremy Shockey and Xzibit, *NFL Street 2* cover stars.

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A new *Madden* curse?

GRAND THEFT GENRE

THE MANY MINIGAMES OF SAN ANDREAS

Quick: Name a game genre that isn't in *GTA: San Andreas.* Nearly impossible. This ginormous über-experience features every genre under the sun, only failing when it comes to playing as a spell-casting Merlin. While not all are executed perfectly—what other game would tackle such an overwhelming feat? That's the risk-taking Rockstar for you. Now take a walk with us down genre lane.

COIN-OP-PORTUNITY

While *San Andreas* doesn't feature true coin-op classics from the days of yore, it offers up palatable substitutes. Try out the likes of *Go-Go Space Monkey* or *They Came From Uranus* at nearby pseudo–7-11s.

REMINDS US OF: *Namco Museum*

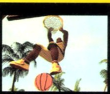
GENRE SCORE: [●●●●○]

SHOOTING HOOPS

While lobbing bombs from the curb isn't going to have anyone mistaking *San Andreas* for *NBA 2K5,* it's still a good stress reliever after knocking out rival gangs via drive-by.

REMINDS US OF: *NBA Ballers*

GENRE SCORE: [●○○○○]



HEALTHY LIVING

San Andreas is in a state of emergency when it comes to healthy living. Grease-infused eateries line the streets, and it takes a serious button-mashing workout session to keep CJ's gut inside his belt.

REMINDS US OF: *The Sims*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

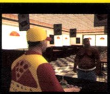
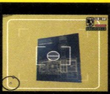


PHOTO OPS

Snapping pictures in *GTA* can be necessary, serving as proof that you killed off a key witness in the wilderness. You can also snap scenery around San Fierro, resulting in easier access to firearms for your killing sprees.

REMINDS US OF: *Fatal Frame II: The Crimson Butterfly*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●○]



TAGGING

"Getting up" around Los Santos with a can of spray paint is how to announce the return of the Grove Street Families. And while you can't put your tag just anywhere, "going over" the Ballas tags or spraying one directly in the grimy mud is reward enough.

REMINDS US OF: *THUG 2*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●●]

AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH

Is there anything better than flying down the slopes of Mount Chilead on your Huffy, the wind blowing through your Afro, with the sound of Willie Nelson's "Crazy" tickling your tympanic? Yes, but not much.

REMINDS US OF: *Downhill Domination*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●●]

COMPLETE THE LOOK

Sporting the trendiest hoody or the latest cornrows earns you as much respect with your boys as with the hoochies strolling the street. Head into the varied stores of San Andreas to complete your look. If only it didn't take CJ so long to switch up his duds.

REMINDS US OF: *Def Jam Fight for NY*

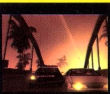
GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

PEDAL TO THE METAL

The title implies you'll need to spin wheels to get by, but the fun comes when it's someone else's car you ram through the city's streets. Until CJ learns how to be a wheelman, this can be a spinout party, but once he's got his grip, there's nothing better than a road trip to The Strip.

REMINDS US OF: *Burnout 3*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●○]



SKINNY DIP

Water's been a deadly killer in this franchise for too long. Now CJ can get more than his feet wet. But realism still takes hold if you try submerging too long, and you'll end up sleeping with the fishes.

REMINDS US OF: *Ecco the Dolphin*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●●]

BLASTIN' FOOLS

While immediate threats will still make it past your scope, the shooting's hugely improved in *San Andreas*. And somehow it's still disturbingly fun to go vigilante on some nincompoop just strolling down the boardwalk, daydreaming of a better life.

REMINDS US OF: *Max Payne*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

TAKING FLIGHT

Flying the friendly San Andreas skies takes getting used to, especially when you're zipping around in a jet. But with a skyline that's three times higher than in past games, there's plenty of room for Red Baron (not the frozen pizza) barrel rolls.

REMINDS US OF: *Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

SHAKE YOUR GROOVE THANG

Possibly the game's worst bit, it's still fun to watch the background dancers shimmy-shimmy-shake like repetitive goofballs, while autistic onlookers repeat the same dingbat phrases time and again.

REMINDS US OF: *Dance Dance Extreme*

GENRE SCORE: [●○○○○]

GOT YOUR BACK

GTA's squad-based shooting is troubled. Your boys tend to have the collective IQ of a team of dead iguanas and often struggle to keep up if you walk away. Still, they will occasionally save your hide by busting caps every once in a blue while.

REMINDS US OF: *SOCOM II*

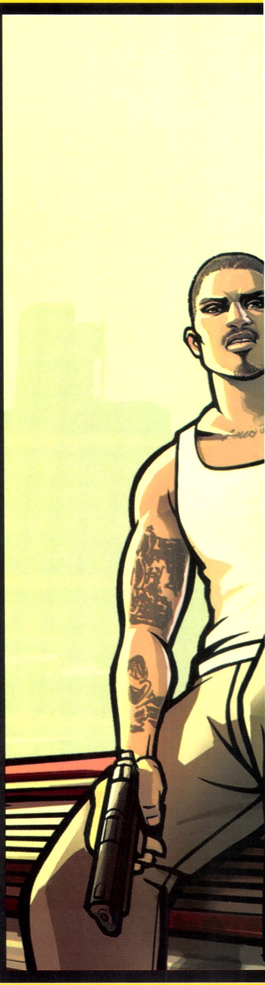
GENRE SCORE: [●●○○○]

KNOCKIN' BOOTS

Three cities, three girls, and all of them complete nutjobs. Still, there's something inexplicably sweet about doing drive-by shootings on a second date. Or is that our own odd depravity?

REMINDS US OF: *The Urbz*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●○]



COLLECTION AGENCY

Fifty snapshots, 50 oysters, 50 tags, 30 cars for exporting. This game can be as much about collection as saving your 'hood from hostile takeover. If only the world weren't so freakin' huge we wouldn't need a strategy guide.

REMINDS US OF: *Jak and Daxter*

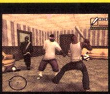
GENRE SCORE: [●●●●●]

TÊTE-À-TÊTE

Taking a swing at an innocent pedestrian is cruelly fun, but not as fun as stomping their carcass (sorry God!) While it's too tough to take aim at someone's mandible, grabbing a bat or sword balances everything out and the fun is tripled!

REMINDS US OF: *The Bouncer*

GENRE SCORE: [●●○○○]



TAXI DRIVER

Though it's been around for all the PS2 *GTA*s, it's still a blast to blaze unsuspecting taxi patrons around town at lightspeed, wheeling over blameless sidewalkers along the way.

REMINDS US OF: *Crazy Taxi*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

LEADERSHIP

Chitchatting with some gat-toting ruggish thug means you can build yourself a small army of crazies before a firefight. Just approach, look them in the eye, and ask them to join you with the panache and grace of a true leader.

REMINDS US OF: *Suikoden III*

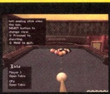
GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

POOL SHARK

Sharking at the local tavern makes this game go from fun to electrifying! Actually, no. Although the pool is well crafted, it makes you wonder why games based entirely around pool bother to exist.

REMINDS US OF: *Real Pool*

GENRE SCORE: [●●●●●]



X GAMES

Just south of Glen Park there's a half-pipe where you can do your best lip-skid if your pedaling isn't up to snuff. Otherwise, it's a surprisingly fun challenge that will keep the Mat Hoffmans of the world entertained.

REMINDS US OF: *Mat Hoffman's BMX 2*

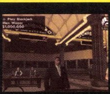
GENRE SCORE: [●●●○○]

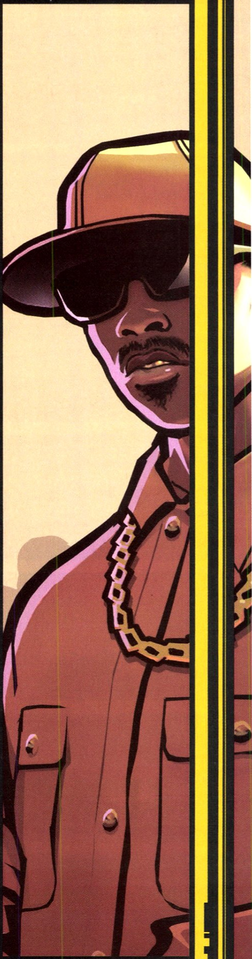
VIVA LAS VEGAS

If it didn't take around 37 minutes for the roulette wheel to stop, and if there were a craps table around so you could put "a nickel" on "big red" and root for "little Joe," Las Venturas would be the greatest place on the *GTA* planet.

REMINDS US OF: *High Rollers Casino*

GENRE SCORE: [●●○○○]





PS2 TRICKS AND REVIEW ARCHIVE

Game names in black bars indicate a Greatest Hits title. Names in yellow indicate a score of 5 out of 5. ⚡indicates the game supports online play.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
.hack//INFECTION	Bandai	●●●◖	65
.hack//MUTATION	Bandai	●●●●	69
.hack//OUTBREAK	Bandai	●●●●	73
.hack//QUARANTINE	Bandai	●●●●	76
18 Wheeler American Pro Trucker	Acclaim	●●●●	52
4x4 EVO	GOD Games	●●●●	44
2002 FIFA World Cup	EA Sports	●●●●	58
Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**51**
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	Namco	●●●●	87
Activision Anthology	Activision	●●●●	64
Aero Elite: Combat Academy	Sega	●●●	67
The Adventures of Cookie & Cream	Agetec	●●●◖	44
Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	●●●●◖	59
Airblade	Namco	●●●●	53
Airforce Delta Strike	Konami	●●●	78
Alias	Acclaim	●●◖	81
Alien Hominid	0-3 Entertainment	●●●●	88
Aliens Versus Predator: Extinction	EA Games	●●●◖	72
All-Star Baseball 2002	Acclaim	●●●◖	44
All-Star Baseball 2003	Acclaim	●●●◖	56
All-Star Baseball 2004	Acclaim	●●●	67
⚡All-Star Baseball 2005	Acclaim	●●◖	80
Alter Echo	THQ	●●	73
American Idol	Codemasters	●	77
⚡Amplitude	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Antz Extreme Racing	Empire	●◖	61
Ape Escape 2	Ubisoft	●●●●◖	70
Ape Escape: Primed & Pumped	Ubisoft	●●◖	88
Aqua Aqua	3DO	●●	42
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	Sony CEA	●●●●	70
Arctic Thunder	Midway	●	50
Armored Core 2	Agetec	●●●	39
Armored Core 2: Another Age	Agetec	●●●◖	48
Armored Core 3	Agetec	●●●◖	61
Armored Core: Nexus	Agetec	●●	85
Army Men: Air Attack	3DO	●●●◖	44
Army Men: Green Rogue	3DO	●●	45
Army Men RTS	3DO	●●●●	56
Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2	3DO	●●◖	45
Asterix & Obelix Kick Buttix	Atari	●●◖	85
Astro Boy	Sega	●●●	85
Atari Anthology	Atari	●●	89
Athens 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	83
ATV Offroad Fury	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**42**
⚡ **ATV Offroad Fury 2**	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**64**
⚡ATV Offroad Fury 3	Sony CEA	●●●●	88
ATV Quad Power Racing 2	Acclaim	●●●●	66
⚡Auto Modellista	Capcom	●●◖	69
Backyard Baseball	Atari	●●◖	81
Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This at Home	Eidos	●●◖	75
Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood	Eidos	●◖	89
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	**Interplay**	●●●●◖	**52**
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Interplay	●●●◖	77
Barbarian	Titus	●●	57
The Bard's Tale	Vivendi Universal	●●●●◖	86
Bass Strike Virtual Fishing Tournament	THQ	●◖	51
Batman: Rise of Sin Tzu	Ubisoft	●●	74
Batman: Vengeance	Ubisoft	●●●	51
Battle Assault 3	Bandai	●●◖	88
Battle Engine Aquila	Atari	●●●◖	65
Battlestar Galactica	Vivendi Universal	●●●	76
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	●●●●	75
Big Mutha Truckers	Empire	●●●	71
Bionicle: The Game	EA Games	●●◖	75
Black & Bruised	Majesco	●●●●	67
Blade II	Activision	●●	62
Blood Omen 2	Eidos	●●●◖	57
BloodRayne	Majesco	●●●◖	63
BloodRayne 2	Majesco	●●●●◖	87
Blood Will Tell	Sega	●●●●	87
Bloody Roar 3	Activision	●●●◖	47
Bloody Roar 4	Konami	●	75
Blowout	Majesco	●●●	77
BMX XXX	Acclaim	●◖	65
Bombastic	Capcom	●●◖	72
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	●●●●	67
Britney's Dance Beat	THQ	●●●●	58
The Bouncer	Square EA	●●●	42
Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Sierra/Fox	●●●◖	73
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	Bam	●●●●	82
Burnout	Acclaim	●●●●◖	52
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	●●●●	63
⚡**Burnout 3: Takedown**	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**85**
Butt-Ugly Martians: Zoom or Doom!	Crave	●●	73
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	**Activision**	●●◖	**67**
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	**Activision**	●●◖	**76**
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2004 Season	Activision	●●◖	74
Cabela's Deer Hunt 2005 Season	Activision	●●●●◖	85
⚡Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	●●●●	89
Capcom Fighting Evolution	Capcom	●◖	88
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	●●●●◖	51
Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	Bam	●●◖	77
CART Fury	Midway	●	47
Casper: Spirit Dimensions	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	50
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	●●●●	74
The Cat in the Hat	Vivendi Universal	●●	76
Catwoman	EA Games	●	84
⚡Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	Sony Online	●●●●◖	78
Chaos Legion	Capcom	●●●◖	70
⚡Chessmaster	Ubisoft	●●●◖	70
Choplifter: Crisis Shield	Xicat	●●●	69
ChoroQ	Atlus	●●●◖	86
City Crisis	Take-Two	●●●	48
Clock Tower 3	Capcom	●●●	68
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim	●●●	83
Colin McRae Rally 3	**Codemasters**	●●●●●	**68**
Commandos 2: Men of Courage	Eidos	●●	62
Conflict: Desert Storm	**Gotham Games**	●◖	**63**
Conflict: Desert Storm II	Gotham Games	●●●	74
Conflict: Vietnam	Global Star	●●◖	86
Conflict Zone	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	●●●●◖	64
Corvette	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Cool Boarders 2001	Sony CEA	●●●●	46
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	**Universal**	●●●◖	**51**
⚡Crash 'N' Burn	Eidos	●●	87
Crash Nitro Kart	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●◖	**76**
Crash Twinsanity	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	86
Crazy Taxi	**Acclaim**	●●●●	**46**
Crimson Sea 2	Koei	●●●◖	80
Crimson Tears	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubisoft	●●	74
Culdcept	SNK	●●●◖	75
Dark Angel: Vampire Apocalypse	Metro3D	●◖	49
Dark Cloud	**Sony CEA**	●●●●◖	**46**
Dark Cloud 2	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**66**
Dark Summit	THQ	●●●◖	52
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	**Acclaim**	●●●◖	**50**
DDR Extreme	Konami	●●●●	85
DDRMAX	Konami	●●●●	63
DDRMAX 2	Konami	●●●●	74
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Tecmo	●●●●◖	39
Dead to Rights	**Namco**	●●●	**65**
Def Jam Vendetta	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**67**
Def Jam Fight for NY	EA Games	●●●●◖	85

Want to play as your favorite rappers but don't have the heart to fight them in story mode in order to unlock them? Use the following codes to score yourself some reward points to unlock your favorites without violating your fan club membership. To do this code, enter the password in the Cheat menu:

NEWJACK	100 reward points
THESOURCE	100 reward points
CROOKLYN	100 reward points

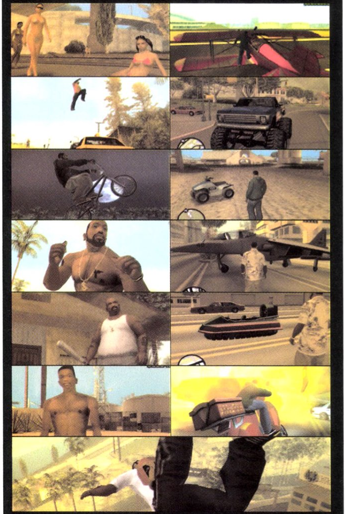
Defender	Midway	●●●◖	62
⚡Destruction Derby Arenas	Gathering	●●◖	80
Deus Ex: The Conspiracy	Eidos	●●●●◖	56

MORE SAN ANDREAS CHEATS

SOME POWERFUL, SOME SILLY, SOME JUST PLAIN AWESOME

Instant flight time. Instant parachute. Instant abs. If you're looking to check out some of the more advanced features of *San Andreas* without putting in all the work, we've got the cheats for you. Just remember, though, as Rockstar puts it, "There is no safe cheat for *San Andreas*." If you save after entering one of these cheats, you do so at your own risk—doing so may even corrupt the other *San Andreas* saves on your card. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Enter these codes during gameplay. Do not pause.



BEACH PARTY Pedestrians dress for the beach.
Up, Up, Down, Down, □, ○, L1, R1, △, Down

HIGH JUMP CJ jumps 10 times higher than normal.
Up, Up, △, △, Up, Up, Left, Right, □, R2, R2

CJ PHONE HOME BMX bike bunny-hops to an insane height.
△, □, ○, ○, □, ○, ○, L1, L2, L2, R1, R2

BEEFCAKE CJ gets maximum muscle.
△, Up, Up, Left, Right, □, ○, Left

BIG BONED CJ gets maximum fat.
△, Up, Up, Left, Right, □, ○, Down

BEANPOLE CJ gets minimum fat and muscle.
△, Up, Up, Left, Right, □, ○, Right

FALL GUY CJ gets a parachute.
Left, Right, L1, L2, R1, R2, R2, Up, Down, Right, L1

BARREL ROLL Spawns a stunt plane.
○, Up, L1, L2, Down, R1, L1, L1, Left, Left, ⊗, △

SUNDAY, SUNDAY, SUNDAY Spawns a monster truck.
Right, Up, R1, R1, R1, Down, △, △, ⊗, ○, L1, L1

OFFROAD FURY Spawns a quad bike.
Left, Left, Down, Down, Up, Up, □, ○, △, R1, R2

FLYBOY Spawns a Hydra.
△, △, □, ○, ⊗, L1, L1, Down, Up

VORTEX Spawns a hovercraft.
△, △, □, ○, ⊗, L1, L2, Down, Down

VEHICLE OF DEATH CJ's vehicle is invulnerable, and makes any vehicle it touches explode.
L1, L2, L2, Up, Down, Down, Up, R1, R2, R2

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29 MVP Baseball
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30 Need for Speed Underground Rivals
32 NFL Street 2
32 Ridge Racer
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33 THUG 2 Remix
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33 Twisted Metal: Head On
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33 Wipeout Pure

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Fight Night Round 2 78

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>Star Wars: Empire At War
REDEMPTION: CGW presents the first look at this Star Wars RTS.

>1UP BUZZOMETER
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2 Resident Evil 4
3 GTA: San Andreas
4 NFS Underground 2
5 FFVII: Advent Children
6 Gran Turismo 4
7 Kingdom Hearts 2
8 NBA Street Vol. 3
9 DOOM 3
10 Fable

REDEMPTION
TRAILER
UPDATED
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The most acessible Resident Evil ever made.

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If all you need is action, action, action...and some words would be pretty good in the meantime, then head on over here to see what's up.

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Any second of any minute of any hour of any day of any month of any year, there will be someone here to disagree with.

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Had an encounter of the third kind? Did it involve your underwear? These are some people you might want to know....

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

DIRTY TRICKS FOR MULTIPLAYER

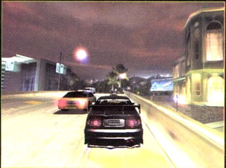
Here are some things you should know that will help you evolve as the new king of the streets against real-life opponents. You'll need to develop your racing savvy, of course, but you'll also need to be aware of the conditions of your surroundings and certain circumstances that you can use to your advantage. This information is always valuable when playing against computer opponents, but is especially useful if you're up against real-life racers who don't always play by the rules.

SURFACE TRACTION

Although there are several different surface types in the game, most have no effect on your speed—not even grass. Wet tracks lessen your traction by about 10 percent, but that's about it.

STABILITY CONTROL VS. FAST LINES

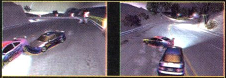
The Stability Control option adds more forgiveness to your car's handling. With Stability Control on, you won't be able to slide your tail out as easily, so it helps to prevent undesirable slides. It also serves to straighten your car out with less effort after cornering. Experienced racers, however, turn this option off to get a more responsive "feel" from the car while ripping around the streets. With the option deactivated, the driver maintains the ability to throw the car's tail end out quite easily. Consequently, this provides for more dynamic drifting and controlled oversteer. When you've mastered this art, you can achieve better track times. This helps you become a more efficient driver and shave some time off your best laps.



THE OUTER LANES

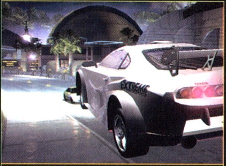
Along most stretches of highway in Bayview, there are outer lanes that have a yellow, diagonal-lined pattern on them. These are not driving lanes, so you'll never see traffic in them. However, they are not too difficult to maneuver through in smaller cars.

This strategy also applies to sidewalks; however, this trick will demand much better timing. Sidewalks are commonly lined with street signs, so you'll have to get in and out fairly quickly.



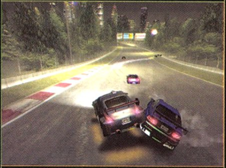
THE NUDGE

Aggressive racers appreciate this maneuver. The nudge is a hard tap with your car on either of the rear quarter panels of the car in front of you. If you keep the pressure up, especially on a corner while steering into the leading car, you can send it careening off into the guardrail. This equates to at least a five-second lead for you.



HANG TIME

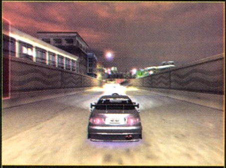
The alignment of your car just prior to hang time can have a profound effect on your safe arrival back on earth. If you hit a jump at any sort of angle or rotational vector, that angle and rotation will continue to increase while your car is in the air. You may even land backward if you're not careful! Hit your jumps and catch air straight on for the best results.



Try the push-out technique just before a jump. If you and another car are racing neck and neck down the strip and there is a place ahead to catch air, throw in a nudge to the car in front of you right before hitting the jump. This technique sends them off in the wrong direction once in the air, and is almost impossible to recover from when done effectively.

CATCH-UP MODE

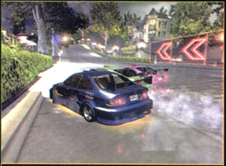
Catch-up mode can be a blessing or a curse. The cars behind the leader are temporarily given increased acceleration and top speed to match them to the leader. If you bail and fall far enough behind to engage the catch-up, your speed and acceleration will go to new ballistic levels. If you can keep it together without crashing, you'll likely blow right by the leaders when you do catch them.



CHICKEN

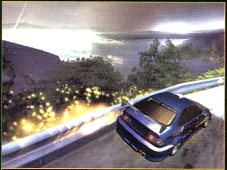
If another racer is hard on your tail drafting you, speed toward a car ahead in the road. Wait until the last possible moment to turn aside and dodge.

The trailing racer's view is blocked if he's really close behind, enough to not see some of the cars in front of you. As you pull away at the last second, he may end up either totaled or in less of a position to pass you and steal your hard-earned lead.



BLOCKING

Blocking is an essential skill. Certain types of races—like Street X—will demand it more than others, but it will help you almost everywhere. Learn to watch your mirrors and check behind you often to keep track of your opponents' positions. Wait for a pursuing racer to make a move. Anticipate his path and cut him off. Run him into a guardrail or just keep moving to stay in front of him and he'll never get the opportunity to get by you. Keep an eye out for your surroundings, though; you don't want to get caught off guard and bail while trying to take someone else out.



RIDING RAILS

If you get frustrated doing all this technical braking and turning, you have an option. On some corners you can swing your car wide, actually grinding along the guardrail or red track barriers. If the corner is smooth enough and you come in fast and at a low angle, you can ride that rail all the way around and shoot out the turn exit like a rocket. Often you can leave the corner at a higher speed than an opponent who enters and performs the perfect brake-and-turn maneuver.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Devil May Cry	**Capcom**	●●●●●	**50**
Devil May Cry 2	**Capcom**	●●●	**66**
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	Bandai	●●●	88
Digital Hitz Factory	XS Games	●●●●	76
Dino Stalker	Capcom	●●●◖	61
Disaster Report	Agetec	●●●◖	65
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	●●●●	72
Disney Golf	EA Games	●●●●	61
Disney's Extreme Skate Adventure	Activision	●●●●	73
Disney's PK: Out of the Shadows	Ubisoft	●●◖	63
Disney's Treasure Planet	Sony CEA	●●●◖	64
A Dog's Life	Hip Interactive	●●	84
Donald Duck: Goin' Quackers	Ubisoft	●●●◖	42
Downforce	Titus	●●	57
Downhill Domination	Sony CEA	●●●●	71
Dr. Muto	Midway	●●◖	63
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	**Atari**	●●●◖	**65**
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	**Atari**	●●◖	**76**
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3	Atari	●●●●	88
Dragon Rage	3DO	●◖	54
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
Drakengard	Square Enix USA	●●	78
DRIV3R	Atari	●●●◖	83
Driven	Bam	●	52
Driving Emotion Type-S	Square EA	●●◖	41
Drome Racers	EA Games	●●◖	64
Dropship	Bam	●●●●	57
Dual Hearts	Atlus	●●●	61
Duel Masters	Atari	●●●	89
The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee	Ubisoft	●●●◖	87
Dynasty Tactics	Koei	●●●●◖	61
Dynasty Tactics 2	Koei	●●●●	74
Dynasty Warriors 2	Koei	●●●●	38
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	●●●●	52
Dynasty Warriors 3: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	65
Dynasty Warriors 4	Koei	●●●●◖	68
Dynasty Warriors 4: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●◖	75
Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires	**Koei**	●●●●	**85**
Ecco the Dolphin: Defender of the Future	Acclaim	●●◖	56
Echo Night: Beyond	Agetec	●●●	84
Egg Mania: Eggstreme Madness	Kemco	●●◖	61
⚡eJay Clubworld	Crave	●●	73
Endgame	Empire	●●	59
Enter the Matrix	**Atari**	●●●	**71**
Ephemeral Fantasia	Konami	●◖	49
Escape from Monkey Island	**LucasArts**	●●●●●	**46**
⚡ESPN College Hoops	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	76
⚡ESPN College Hoops 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	88
ESPN International Track & Field	Konami	●●●	39
ESPN International Winter Sports 2002	Konami	●●●●	54
⚡ESPN Major League Baseball	ESPN Videogames	●●●◖	80
ESPN MLS Extra Time	Konami	●●	44
ESPN National Hockey Night	Konami	●◖	45
ESPN NBA 2Night	Konami	●●	42
ESPN NBA 2Night 2002	Konami	●●●	56
⚡ESPN NBA 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●	87
⚡ESPN NBA Basketball	**ESPN Videogames**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡ESPN NFL Football	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	72
⚡ESPN NFL 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●	84

Money and fame often come before glory in the NFL, so why should you be treated any differently? Enter the following codes to grant yourself a million crib points and unlock all crib items. You can even enter a code to get all the milestones without ever stepping onto the field.

Enter these case-sensitive codes as your VIP name to activate:

PhatBank	1 million crib points
CribMax	Every crib item
MadSkilz	Every milestone complete

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
⚡ESPN NHL Hockey	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	73
⚡ESPN NHL 2K5	ESPN Videogames	●●●●◖	85
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding	Konami	●●●	41
ESPN Winter X Games Snowboarding 2002	Konami	●●●	53
ESPN X Games Skateboarding	Konami	●●●●	49
Eternal Ring	Agetec	●●	38
Eve of Extinction	Eidos	●●◖	56
Everblue 2	Capcom	●●●	66
Evergrace	Agetec	●●	39
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	●●◖	66
⚡EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers	Sony Online	●●●◖	77
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	THQ	●●●	70
Evil Twin	Ubisoft	●●	52
Evolution Skateboarding	Konami	●●◖	63
Evolution Snowboarding	Konami	●	65
Extermination	Sony CEA	●●◖	48
Extreme-G III	Acclaim	●●●●	50
EyeToy: AntiGrav	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
EyeToy: Groove	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	80
F1 2001	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**52**
F1 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	60
F1 Career Challenge	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**71**
F1 Championship	Ubisoft	●●●●	43
F1 Championship Season 2000	EA Sports	●●◖	41
Fairly OddParents: Shadow Showdown	THQ	●●●◖	88
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	Interplay	●●◖	78
Fantavision	Sony CEA	●●●●	40
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	●●●●	55
Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly	Tecmo	●●●●	77
Ferrari F355 Challenge	Sega	●●	61
FIFA 2001 Major League Soccer	EA Sports	●●●●◖	39
FIFA 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
FIFA Soccer 2003	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**63**
⚡FIFA Soccer 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡FIFA Soccer 2005	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**86**
Fight Club	Vivendi Universal	●◖	87
⚡Fight Night 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●	**80**
Fighter Maker 2	Agetec	●◖	64
Final Fantasy X	**Square EA**	●●●●●	**53**
Final Fantasy X-2	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**75**
⚡Final Fantasy XI	**Square Enix USA**	●●●●●	**78**
⚡Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Square Enix USA	●●●●	87
Finding Nemo	**THQ**	●●●◖	**71**
Fireblade	Midway	●●◖	59
Fisherman's Challenge	Konami	●●	67
Ford Racing 2	Gotham Games	●●◖	76
Forever Kingdom	Agetec	●◖	53
Forgotten Realms: Demon Stone	Atari	●●●◖	86
Formula One 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	50
Freaky Flyers	Midway	●●●◖	72
Freedom Fighters	**EA Games**	●●●●●	**73**
Freekstyle	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●	**59**
Freestyle Metal X	Midway	●●●	71
Frequency	Sony CEA	●●●◖	52
Frogger: The Great Quest	Konami	●◖	53
Frogger's Adventure: The Rescue	Konami	●●◖	76
Front Mission 4	Square Enix	●●●●	82
Fugitive Hunter	Encore	●	76
Fullmetal Alchemist	Square Enix	●●●	89
Fur Fighters: Viggo's Revenge	Acclaim	●●●	46
Futurama	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	72
Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave	●●●◖	81
G1 Jockey 3	Koei	●●●◖	69
Gadget Racers	Conspiracy	●●●◖	50
Galactic Wrestling Featuring Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	●●◖	82
Galerians: Ash	Sammy	●◖	66
Gallop Racer	Tecmo	●●	48
Gallop Racer 2003: A New Breed	Tecmo	●●●	69
Gallop Racer 2004	Tecmo	●●●●	85
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	Midway	●●●◖	46
The Getaway	Sony CEA	●●●●	66
The Getaway: Black Monday	Sony CEA	●●	89
Get on da Mic	Eidos	●●	87
Ghosthunter	Namco	●●◖	84
Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Bandai	●●	87
⚡Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	●●●	89
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	●●●◖	51
Gitaroo-Man	Koei	●●●◖	53
Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim	●●	75
Gladius	LucasArts	●●●●	74
Goblin Commander: Unleash the Horde	Jaleco	●●◖	76
GoDai: Elemental Force	3DO	●◖	54
Godzilla: Save the Earth	Atari	●●◖	88
⚡GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	EA Games	●●●	89
Gradius III and IV	Konami	●●◖	39
Gradius V	Konami	●●●◖	85
Gran Turismo 3: A-spec	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**46**
Grand Prix Challenge	Atari	●●●◖	68
Grand Theft Auto III	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**52**
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**87**
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	**Rockstar**	●●●●●	**63**
Grandia II	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Grandia Xtreme	Enix	●●●◖	62
Gravity Games Bike: Street, Vert, Dirt	Midway	◖	61
The Great Escape	Gotham Games	●●●◖	72
⚡Gretzky NHL 2005	Sony CEA	●●◖	88
⚡Growlanser Generations	Working Designs	●●●●	88
GTC Africa	Majesco	●●◖	58
Guilty Gear Isuka	Sammy	●●●●	86
Guilty Gear X	Majesco/Sammy	●●●●	51
Guilty Gear X2	Sammy	●●●●	66
Gungrave	Sega	●●●◖	61
Gungrave: Overdose	Mastiff	●●●◖	86
GunGriffon Blaze	Working Designs	●●●◖	39
The Guy Game	Gathering	●	85
Half-Life	**Sierra**	●●●●●	**51**
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	**EA Games**	●●●	**75**
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	EA Games	●◖	76
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	EA Games	●●●◖	64
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	EA Games	●●●●	82
Harvest Moon: Save the Homeland	Natsume	●●●●	51
Haunted Mansion	TDK	●●●	77
Haven: Call of the King	Midway	●●●◖	64
Headhunter	Acclaim	●●●	57
Headhunter: Redemption	Sega	●●●	86
Herdy Gerdy	Eidos	●●●	56
Heroes of Might and Magic	3DO	●●◖	46
Hidden Invasion	Conspiracy	●●●	60
High Heat MLB 2002	3DO	●●●●	44
High Heat MLB 2003	3DO	●●●●◖	55
High Heat MLB 2004	**3DO**	●●●●●	**67**
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	●●●●◖	81
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	**Eidos**	●●●●◖	**63**
The Hobbit	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	76
Hot Shots Golf 3	**Sony CEA**	●●●●	**55**
⚡Hot Shots Golf Fore!	Sony CEA	●●●◖	85
⚡Hot Wheels: Stunt Track Challenge	THQ	●●●◖	89
Hot Wheels: Velocity X	THQ	●●◖	64
The Hulk	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●●	**70**
Hunter: The Reckoning–Wayward	Interplay	●●◖	72
Hypersonic Xtreme	Majesco	●●◖	67
I-Ninja	Namco	●●●◖	75
Ico	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**50**
The Incredibles	THQ	●●●◖	88
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	●●●	71
Indy Car Series	Codemasters	●●●	71
Intellivision Lives!	Crave	●●●◖	77
Inuyasha: The Secret of the Cursed Mask	Bandai	●	89
Island Extreme Stunts	EA Games	●●●◖	65
The Italian Job	Eidos	●●	72
Jade Cocoon 2	Ubisoft	●●●◖	53
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**52**
Jak II	**Sony CEA**	●●●◖	**74**
Jak 3	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	87
James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire	**EA Games**	●●●●	**52**
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	EA Games	●●●●◖	79
James Bond 007: NightFire	**Activision**	●●●●◖	**64**
James Cameron's Dark Angel	Sierra	●●	65
Jeopardy!	Atari	●●◖	77
Jeremy McGrath Supercross World	Acclaim	●	53
Jet X20	Sony CEA	●●	63
Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies	THQ	●●●	88
Jonny Moseley Mad Trix	3DO	●◖	54
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death	Evolved Games	●●◖	80
The Jungle Book: Rhythm n' Groove	Ubisoft	●●●	69
Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis	Universal Int.	●●●●◖	68
K-1 World Grand Prix	Konami	●●	71
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	●●●●	75
Karaoke Revolution Volume 2	Konami	●●●●◖	83
Karaoke Revolution Volume 3	Konami	●●●●◖	87
Katamari Damacy	Namco	●●●●◖	86
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer	Activision	●●●◖	61
Kengo: Master of Bushido	Crave	●●●	42
Kessen	EA Games	●●●	39
Kessen II	Koei	●●●	51
kill.switch	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**75**

SCARE TACTICS

Has there ever been a game more terrifying than *Fatal Frame* or *Fatal Frame 2*? We don't think so. Personally, we found the first one a wee bit scarier, but your mileage may vary. If you're in the mood for a fine frightfest, turn off the lights, crank up the sound, and prepare for terror.

POTTY MOUTH

Here's a little *Getaway* humor for you:

Q: What do you get when you combine a true-to-life rendering of downtown London, a cast of foul-mouthed Cockney thugs, a really touchy driving engine, and some creepy cinematics?

A: Go f*** yourself!

POLYPHONIC HARMONY

"My staff are people I scouted for the project," says Kazunori Yamauchi, "people whom I struggled to find. The concept for the team was centered on those who could lead the industry in 3D graphics and physics simulations, which were new to the gaming industry."

BEHIND THE GAME

GRAN TURISMO

THE CREATION OF ONE OF VIDEOGAMING'S BIGGEST FRANCHISES

POLYPHONY

n: music arranged in parts for several voices or instruments

"We call ourselves Polyphony Digital for a reason," explains Kazunori Yamauchi, the father of *Gran Turismo*. "'Polyphony' is meant to suggest a place for polyphonic people, and for their voices, to mix with one another. *Gran Turismo* is certainly not created in my monophony."

While the end product may well be a collaboration of dozens of talented minds, the original vision for this landmark series belongs to one man. Since he was 15 years old, Mr. Yamauchi has been dreaming about a game that focuses on realistic driving and showcases the beauty of cars.

Getting hired on at Sony Computer Entertainment in 1993 was just the opportunity he was looking for. Sony's new PlayStation offered the perfect canvas on which to paint his masterpiece.

But it wasn't all wine and roses. The driving-simulator-with-licensed-cars thing had been attempted once before. Electronic Arts' original *Need for Speed* on the ill-fated 3DO system included a handful of real-world dream cars. And while it received critical acclaim, the system that played host to the game kept it from becoming a commercial hit, and Electronic Arts quickly switched over to a more arcade-style format in subsequent iterations of the title.

But that didn't slow down Yamauchi. After all, *Gran Turismo* wasn't meant to be a showcase for only dream cars coming out of places like Porsche, Lamborghini, and Ferrari. *Gran Turismo* is a celebration of all cars. And after making the hard sell to vehicle manufacturers worldwide—many of whom never considered a videogame as a marketing tool—*Gran Turismo* was released on the PlayStation in 1997.

GT instantly struck a chord with both gamers and car enthusiasts the world over. Here was a game in which you could buy and sell your own ride, modify it with performance parts and visual upgrades, and view gorgeous replays of your greatest races, thanks to Polyphony's ability to push the PlayStation hardware to its absolute limit. Yamauchi and his team had not just realized his dream, but created a driving game that would be imitated—if never duplicated—for years to come, a fact that puts a smile on Yamauchi's face. "When *GT* was first released, there were no other games that included real existing cars and their real driving feel, and in which that factor was one of the main selling points. If you look at the market today, you will notice that most, if not all, racing games do this now."

Another reason *Gran Turismo* is so often imitated has to be that it was one of the first games to cross over into mainstream culture in a big way, introducing a whole legion of car enthusiasts to Sony's PlayStation.

Gran Turismo 2 was all about being bigger and better. Due to the incredible success of the first game, car manufacturers recognized the advantage of being included in this interactive phenomenon. The result was a roster of more than 500 cars in the 1999 sequel. As for gameplay upgrades, the biggest addition to *Gran Turismo 2*—aside from a massive

EVERY COVER STAR IS ONE OF YAMAUCHI'S PERSONAL RIDES. YES, EVEN THE GT

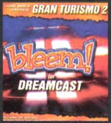
PlayStation
GRAN TURISMO
GT2 GRAN TURISMO
PlayStation 2
GRAN TURISMO 3 A-spec
NTSC U/C
GRAN TURISMO™ 4
THE REAL DRIVING SIMULATOR
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

STUFF YOU MAY NOT KNOW

GRAN TURISMO Concept
2001 TOKYO COLLECTION

LOST TURISMO

The four *Gran Turismo* titles that have come to the United States are far from the only *Turismo* games out there. Aside from manufacturer-related one-offs used as marketing tools, there have been a series of *Gran Turismo Concept* games released in Asia and Europe. *GTC* titles feature concept cars displayed at both the Tokyo and Geneva auto shows. Alas, there are still no plans to release *Gran Turismo Concept* in the United States.



SEGA'S GRAN TURISMO 2?

Did you know it is possible to play *Gran Turismo 2* on Sega's Dreamcast console? Back in 2001, a company called Bleem (which had already released a PlayStation emulator for the PC and Mac), released three Bleemcast discs that would play *Tekken 3*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Gran Turismo 2* on Sega's oddly named system. Thanks to an expensive legal battle with Sony, Bleem closed its doors soon after the final Bleemcast disc was released.

The Cardigans

THEIR FAVORITE GAME

Swedish rock group the Cardigans were so enamored with the first *Gran Turismo* that they played it nonstop during the recording of their fourth studio album. So when it came time to give the record a name, they figured *Gran Turismo* would be perfect. The single "My Favorite Game" off said album also serves as the intro song in the U.S. version of *Gran Turismo 2*.

SHOCKING SUCCESS

While Sony's dual analog PlayStation controller was already around in 1997, *Gran Turismo* served as the launching pad for the now-standard DualShock controller. Featuring rubber sticks and a rumble feature, it set the standard for every game controller since.

number of races to complete in career mode—was rally racing.

Really, though, *Gran Turismo 2* was more a refinement of what Polyphony Digital had started with the original *Gran Turismo*. The series had gone from a moderately ambitious driving simulator to one of the crown jewels in the PlayStation's lineup.

So it stood to reason that when the PlayStation 2 launched in 2000 it came with the promise of an all-new *Gran Turismo*. In fact, the Japanese launch even featured a demo disc of *Gran Turismo 2000*. It would be over a year later, however, before people got their next real driving-simulator fix—in the form of *Gran Turismo 3 A-spec*.

Why the long wait? It seems a quickie sequel wasn't something Yamauchi was interested in: "Originally, *GT2000* was developed to showcase the new technology of PlayStation 2—to serve as a unique extension of the past two titles, with some new tracks and cars. However, as we dove further into development and began experimenting more and more with the technology, our passion grew higher and we set forth to offer a full, new experience, enabling the product to be a stand-alone edition, essentially morphing it into *GT3*."

Being a year late didn't hurt Sony's flagship racing title one little bit, though. Since its release in 2001, *Gran Turismo 3* has sold over 6 million copies in the United States alone, and it shows no signs of slowing down.

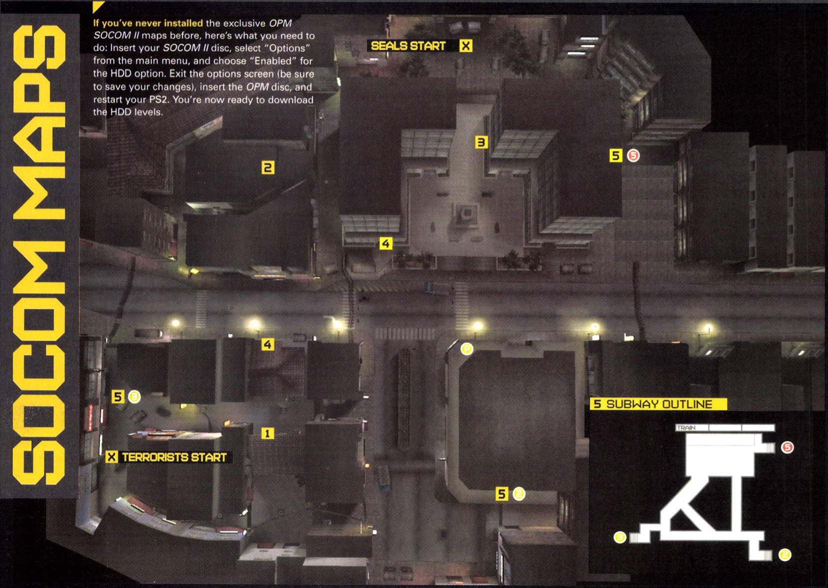
But Yamauchi and his team aren't resting on their laurels. Despite the massive success of *GT3*, *GT4* will simply leave it in the dust. After all, Yamauchi is a perfectionist, and success doesn't necessarily mean a game is the best it can be. "Looking back on *Gran Turismo 3 A-spec*, I felt that the overall game design was kept too simple. As a result, some players may have felt as if participating in races was more an obligation, a worklike process. With *GT4*, my team and I have made significant enhancements and have introduced a new style of gameplay to ensure that players are left with a new and entertaining experience that continues to raise the bar for an all-new *Gran Turismo* experience."

> "I FELT THAT THE OVERALL DESIGN OF GT3 WAS KEPT TOO SIMPLE."

Who would have thought back in 1997 that *Gran Turismo* would become the force it is today? Its influence has extended well beyond just games, also becoming a marketing tool for car manufacturers around the world. Who knew that these same manufacturers who balked at being in the first game would eventually solicit Sony for inclusion in each new *Gran Turismo* sequel? The *GT* series is one of the earliest examples of cross-culture gaming, and *Gran Turismo 4* will undoubtedly make the link between the videogame and racing worlds stronger than ever. « *Greg Sewart*

SOCOM MAPS

If you've never installed the exclusive *OPM SOCOM II* maps before, here's what you need to do: Insert your *SOCOM II* disc, select "Options" from the main menu, and choose "Enabled" for the HDD option. Exit the options screen (be sure to save your changes), insert the *OPM* disc, and restart your PS2. You're now ready to download the HDD levels.

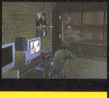


AFTER HOURS

THE BEST SNIPING SPOTS IN SEOUL, KOREA

So you're not an early adopter. Maybe you missed out on the first round of levels through no fault of your own. It's OK. We understand. In fact, we've compiled these maps one last time, just for you.

Now that half the world already has 'em, though, you're going to need some help. So here's our list of some of our favorite hide-and-go-boom sites on After Hours.



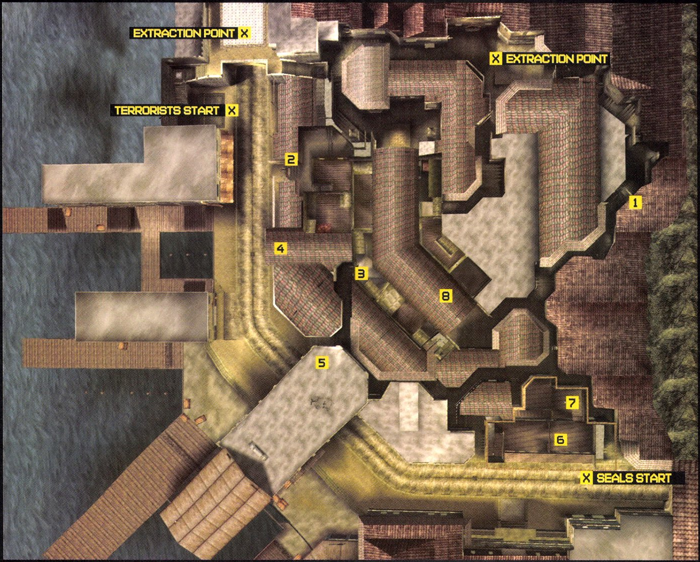
THE CYBER CAFÉ
One of the most versatile locations on the map, and it's just steps away from the terrorists' start point. Climb up the crates to get to the lower rooftop. From here you can access a higher snipe point by jumping on the ventilation ducts, or go through the window into the café itself. Inside, you'll find a patio that offers views to the north and east and breakable windows that offer a fine line of sight to the two-story parking garage across the street.

THE FIRE ESCAPE
This one is nearly as useful as the cyber café, but it takes a bit more work to get to. Climb the ladder in this narrow alley and enter through the window. Follow the stairs and you'll come out on a patio with a fine view of the central street.

THE OFFICE BUILDINGS
Climb onto the planters right next to the doorways of these two identical buildings and you'll be able to use the awnings to get to the ledges that run across three sides of each building. There's not a lot of cover here, but it never hurts to have the high ground.

LEDGES AND ROOFTOPS
There are several other areas in the map that don't really offer much of a vantage point for sniping, but they're areas that may not look accessible at first glance, so they work well as surprise tactics to mix up your game.

THE SUBWAY SYSTEM
Three different entrances make the subway tunnels seem like a labyrinth, but they're simpler than they look. Check out the easy-to-follow map above!



LIBERATION

THE INS AND OUTS OF THIS CONVOLUTED MAP

Things get tougher on Liberation. While there aren't as many hidden spots as there are on After Hours, the level's a lot more complex, with its convoluted alleyways and deathtrap marketplace. While there are more places to hide, there aren't as many places you can feel safe hiding in. But don't worry; we've got some general tips to make your Liberation experience more rewarding.

1 This is a door. It opens and shuts via a switch on the terrorists' side. It's a strong metal door; it can't be blown up or forced open. This makes it perhaps the most important point on the entire map. You see, this door effectively blocks the quickest path from the SEALs' insertion point to the closer of the two extraction points. If the SEALs get there first with VIPs in tow, they stand a good chance of making it to the extraction point just around the corner. If the terrorists get there first to close the door—or, say, mine it—they will force the SEALs to escort the VIPs by a much more visible route. You'll find other doors at **2** and **3** that also aid in restricting the SEALs to the main road, but neither door is as effective as this one.

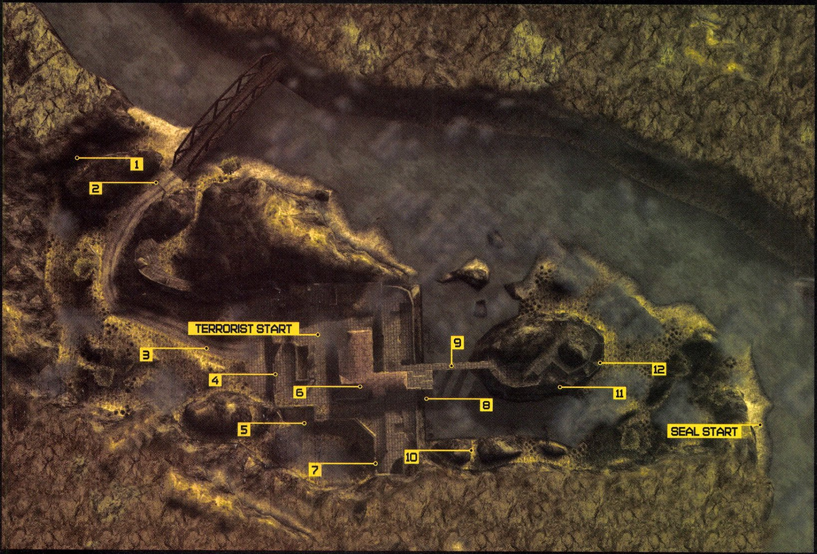
4 This rooftop vantage point is particularly useful for terrorists—it provides a good field of view down the main road (especially helpful if you've blocked off many of the alternate paths) and allows you to effectively lob grenades down the neighboring alleyways. You can also get a scoped view of anyone hiding out on **5**.

5 This broad rooftop isn't as useful as it may seem. Sure, SEALs can snipe any terrorist hiding out at the extraction point at the end of the road, but not without coming out into the open to do it. No, about the only thing this place is good for is a very obvious diversion. Now, the box-strewn warehouse underneath—that's a different story.

6 This suite of rooms overlooking the SEALs' start point would be a great place for terrorists to rush to if they suspect that the SEALs haven't moved the VIPs. It has two entrances, neither of which is visible from the SEALs' start point, and it can be reasonably well defended. Alternately, it can serve as a spot for SEALs to stash the last remaining VIP if the other two are killed off; it's one of the few places on the SEALs' side of the map that can be decently protected against snipers, grenade attacks, and ground incursions.

7 Just off these rooms is a stairway with a broken railing, which allows enterprising campers to position themselves below the stairs, offering a well-hidden view of anyone coming down from above. Not terribly useful, to be sure, but it could be the difference in a heated match.

8 Finally, in a surprising contrast to the last map, After Hours, Liberation sports very few out-of-the way sniper spots. In fact, the only "secret" snipe point we could find was this paltry tent in the back of the balconied marketplace. If you jump carefully onto the low stack of boxes in front of it and then to the higher stack, you can leap onto the tent, climb around to the back, and lie prone without being seen from below. Yay.



LAST BASTION

THE BIGGEST—AND POSSIBLY BEST—OF THE BREACH MAPS

You crafty terrorists are going to love the final downloadable map. Last Bastion, like Inowapi, is one of those breach maps in which the terrorists can, if they so choose, simply drop mines like crazy and huddle around the bomb-drop like a pack of terrified dogs. The key here for the SEAL team is numbers—fully staffed teams can work together in ways that four- or five-man squads can't.

SEALS

You've got your work cut out for you, men. But this level isn't unbeatable. Unlike Inowapi, there's no place for a terrorist to feel completely safe from a well-placed grenade—even if you haven't yet penetrated the inner sanctum. Your best bet is to swing the majority of the SEAL team out into the river, staying well hidden behind the low walls, where you'll be untouchable by all but the craftiest snipers. Head out to 1 and 2—try to coordinate the planting of C4 so that both barriers go down at once.

Get as close to the inner walls as possible, taking special care to avoid the natural ambush point at 3. (You're also going to want to keep an eye out for mines—or terrorists—stashed in the copious undergrowth.) Once you're flat against the wall, get the whole team to start lobbing grenades into the compound simultaneously; you're likely to take out a few terrorists this way with sheer dumb luck. Also, don't neglect the solid snipe points at 10; you can reach them reasonably undetected and use them to toss grenades into the southern end of the compound.

You're also not going to want to be shy with the grenades when you enter the building where the bomb is planted at 6; chances are good that every step will be mined. Climb up to the second floor and drop down from the balcony to avoid the worst of it.

TERRORISTS

Here's an especially terrorist-friendly design element: If you close the gates at 4 and 7, the SEALs will have to either blow two sets of doors or try to streak across the bridge of death at 9. Even the tunnel from the waterline door at 8 leads to an area outside the inner sanctum at 5. So first things first: Close the gates, post guards on the bridge, and have a sniper or two watch the three rear entry points.

Now, any SEAL who knows his business isn't going to try the bridge more than once or twice. So once you've discouraged them from approaching through the breach point at 11, try rushing to 12 and dropping down to sea level; maybe you can sneak up behind the SEALs as they try to swing wide to the north.

If you want to get really crafty, look around the bomb room at 6—notice how most of the entrances require a step down into the room. That means you can place a mine in such a way that it's virtually invisible to anyone coming in from that direction. While we're on the subject of mines, remember that if you place a mine in the middle of a bush it's all but undetectable. You may also notice that the area behind the fortress (you know, the place where the SEALs will come in 90 percent of the time) is very heavily covered with thick ground foliage. You do the math.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
⚡Killzone	Sony CEA	●●●●	87
Kinetica	Sony CEA	●●●●◖	50
King Arthur	Konami	●	88
King of Fighters 2000/2001	SNK Playmore	●●◖	76
King of Fighters 2002/2003	SNK Playmore	●●●●	88
King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	SNK Playmore	●●●	87
The King of Route 66	Sega	●●●	67
King's Field: The Ancient City	Agetec	●●	55
Kingdom Hearts	**Square EA**	**●●●●◖**	**61**
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	●●●●◖	47
Knockout Kings 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	42
Knockout Kings 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Kuon	Agetec	●●◖	87
Kya: Dark Lineage	Atari	●●◖	76
La Pucelle: Tactics	Mastiff	●●●●	81
Le Mans 24 Hours	Infogrames	●●◖	48
Legacy of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	●●◖	76
Legaia 2: Duel Saga	Fresh Games	●●●	63
The Legend of Alon D'ar	Ubisoft	●◖	54
Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●●◖	53
Legends of Wrestling II	Acclaim	●●●	65
Legion: The Legend of Excalibur	Midway	●●●	59
Lego Racers 2	Lego Media	●●◖	51
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	87
Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events	Activision	●●	89
Lethal Skies	Sammy	●●●	58
Lethal Skies II	Sammy	●●●◖	74
Looney Tunes: Back in Action	EA Games	●	76
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring	Black Label	●●●◖	63
⚡The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**75**
The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age	EA Games	●●	88
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	**EA Games**	**●●●●◖**	**63**
Lowrider	Jaleco	●◖	77
Lupin the 3rd: Treasure of the Sorcerer King	Bandai	●●●◖	78
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi Universal	●●	71
Mad Maestro!	Eidos/Fresh	●●●	56
Madden NFL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●◖	38
Madden NFL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
⚡Madden NFL 2003	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**60**
⚡Madden NFL 2004	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**72**
⚡Madden NFL 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
Mafia	Gathering	●●●◖	79
Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color	Agetec	●●●●	69
Malice	Mud Duck	●●◖	84
Manhunt	**Rockstar**	**●●●◖**	**76**
The Mark of Kri	Sony CEA	●●●	59
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	Capcom	●●●●	61
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	Activision	●●●●	60
Max Payne	**Rockstar**	**●●●●**	**53**
Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Rockstar	●●●◖	77
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	**Capcom**	**●●●◖**	**54**
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	●●●●	77
McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami	◖	84
MDK2 Armageddon	Interplay	●●●◖	45
Medal of Honor: Frontline	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**58**
⚡Medal of Honor: Rising Sun	**EA Games**	**●●●◖**	**76**
Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●◖	83
Mega Man X: Command Mission	Capcom	●●●◖	86
Mega Man X7	Capcom	●●●◖	74
Mega Man X8	Capcom	●●●	88
Men in Black II: Alien Escape	Infogrames	●●◖	60
Mercenaries	LucasArts	●●●●◖	89
Metal Arms: Glitch in the System	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	75
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**51**
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**67**
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	**Konami**	**●●●●●**	**88**
Metropolismania	Natsume	●●●	61
Midnight Club	**Rockstar**	**●●●●**	**39**
⚡Midnight Club II	**Rockstar**	**●●●●●**	**67**
Midway Arcade Treasures	Midway	●●●◖	76
Midway Arcade Treasures 2	Midway	●●●●	87
Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing	Codemasters	●	58
Minority Report	Activision	●●◖	65
Mission: Impossible–Operation Surma	Atari	●●	77
Mister Mosquito	Eidos/Fresh	●●●◖	56
MLB 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	67
⚡MLB 2005	Sony CEA	●●●◖	80
MLB SlugFest 20-03	Midway	●●●●	59
MLB SlugFest 20-04	Midway	●●●●	67
⚡MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway	●●●◖	83
Mobile Light Force 2	XS Games	●●●◖	69
Mobile Suit Gundam: Encounters in Space	Bandai	●	75
Mobile Suit Gundam: Federation vs. Zeon	Bandai	●●●◖	61
Mobile Suit Gundam: Journey to Jaburo	Bandai	●	48
Mobile Suit Gundam: Zeonic Front	Bandai	●●●	54
Mojo!	Crave	●●◖	73
Monopoly Party	Infogrames	●●●	65
Monster 4x4: Masters of Metal	Ubisoft	●●◖	77
Monster Hunter	Capcom	●●●●	86
Monster Rancher 3	Tecmo	●●●●	50
Monster Rancher 4	Tecmo	●●●◖	75
Monsters, Inc.	Sony CEA	●●●◖	55
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	**Midway**	**●●●●**	**64**
⚡Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	●●●●	87
MotoGP	Namco	●●●●	39
MotoGP2	Namco	●●●●◖	53
MotoGP3	Namco	●●●●◖	67
Motor Mayhem	Infogrames	●●●	47
MTV Music Generator 2	Codemasters	●●●	46
MTV Music Generator 3: This Is the Remix	Codemasters	●●●◖	82
MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch	Gotham Games	●◖	76
⚡MTX: Mototrax	Activision	●●◖	80
The Mummy Returns	Universal	●◖	52
Music Maker	Magix	●●●●	69
MVP Baseball 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	67
⚡MVP Baseball 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	80
MX 2002 Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●●	47
MX Rider	Infogrames	●●●◖	52
MX Superfly Featuring Ricky Carmichael	THQ	●●●◖	59
⚡My Street	Sony CEA	●●●	67
Myst III: Exile	Ubisoft	●●●◖	63
Mystic Heroes	Koei	●●◖	64
MX Unleashed	**THQ**	**●●●**	**79**
Namco Museum	**Namco**	**●●●◖**	**53**
NASCAR 2001	EA Sports	●●◖	40
⚡NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**85**
NASCAR Heat	Infogrames	●●●●	47
NASCAR Thunder 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	51
NASCAR Thunder 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◖	62
⚡NASCAR Thunder 2004	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**73**
NASCAR: Dirt to Daytona	Infogrames	●●●◖	63
Naval Ops: Warship Gunner	Koei	●●●	71
NBA 2K2	**Sega Sports**	**●●●●●**	**53**
⚡NBA 2K3	**Sega Sports**	**●●●●●**	**63**
NBA Ballers	Midway Sports	●●●●	80
NBA Hoopz	Midway	●●●	44
NBA Jam 2004	Acclaim	●●◖	75
NBA Live 2001	EA Sports	●●●	42
NBA Live 2002	EA Sports	●●◖	51
⚡NBA Live 2003	EA Sports	●●●●	63
⚡NBA Live 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	75
⚡NBA Live 2005	EA Sports	●●●●	86

Want to out-jump the best that the NBA has to offer? Unlimited air is just a code entry away. While you're at it, enter codes to unlock 50,000 dynasty points and all classic hardwood jerseys. Enter the following codes at the NBA Live Codes menu:

YISS55CZ0E	50,000 dynasty points
XVLJD9895	Unlimited air
PRYI234N0B	All classic hardwood jerseys

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
NBA ShootOut 2001	Sony CEA	●●◖	44
NBA ShootOut 2003	Sony CEA	●●●	63
⚡NBA ShootOut 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	75
NBA Starting Five	Konami	●●◖	63
NBA Street	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●●**	**47**
NBA Street Vol. 2	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●●**	**68**
⚡NCAA College Basketball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	64
NCAA College Football 2K3	Sega Sports	●●◖	60
NCAA Final Four 2001	Sony CEA	●	41
NCAA Final Four 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	52
NCAA Final Four 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	64
⚡NCAA Final Four 2004	Sony CEA	●●	76
NCAA Football 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	48
NCAA Football 2003	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**60**
⚡NCAA Football 2004	**EA Sports**	**●●●●●**	**71**
⚡NCAA Football 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	83
NCAA GameBreaker 2001	Sony CEA	●◖	41
NCAA GameBreaker 2003	Sony CEA	●●	61
⚡NCAA GameBreaker 2004	Sony CEA	●●◖	73
NCAA March Madness 2002	EA Sports	●●●	53
NCAA March Madness 2003	EA Sports	●●●	64
⚡NCAA March Madness 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	76
⚡NCAA March Madness 2005	EA Sports	●●●◖	88
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**62**
⚡Need for Speed Underground	**EA Games**	**●●●●◖**	**76**
⚡Need for Speed Underground 2	**EA Games**	**●●●●●**	**87**
Neo Contra	Konami	●●●◖	87
NFL 2K2	**Sega Sports**	**●●●◖**	**52**
⚡NFL 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
NFL Blitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	55
NFL Blitz 20-03	Midway	●●●◖	60
⚡NFL Blitz Pro	Midway Sports	●●●	74
NFL GameDay 2001	Sony CEA	●	40
NFL GameDay 2002	Sony CEA	●◖	53
⚡NFL GameDay 2003	Sony CEA	●●◖	61
⚡NFL GameDay 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	73
NFL Quarterback Club 2001	Acclaim	●●◖	50
⚡NFL Street	**EA Sports Big**	**●●●●◖**	**78**
⚡NFL Street 2	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	89
NHL 2001	EA Sports	●●●●	38
NHL 2002	EA Sports	●●●●◖	50
NHL 2003	EA Sports	●●●◖	63
⚡NHL 2004	EA Sports	●●●●	73
⚡NHL 2005	EA Sports	●●●◖	85
NHL 2K3	**Sega Sports**	**●●●●●**	**64**
NHL FaceOff 2001	Sony CEA	●●●◖	43
NHL FaceOff 2003	Sony CEA	●●	64
NHL Hitz 20-02	Midway	●●●●	51
NHL Hitz 20-03	Midway	●●●●◖	62
⚡NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	●●●●	73
Nick Toons: Movin'	THQ	●●●	88
Nightmare of Druaga	Namco	●●	87
Ninja Assault	Namco	●●◖	61
No One Lives Forever	Sierra	●●●◖	56
Okage: Shadow King	Sony CEA	●●●	51
Oni	Rockstar	●◖	43
Onimusha: Warlords	**Capcom**	**●●●●**	**43**
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	**Capcom**	**●●●●**	**60**
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	Capcom	●●●●◖	81
Orphen: Scion of Sorcery	Activision	●●●	39
⚡Outlaw Golf 2	Global Star	●◖	88
Pac-Man Fever	Namco	●●	60
Pac-Man World 2	**Namco**	**●●●●◖**	**54**
PaRappa the Rapper 2	Sony CEA	●●●◖	53
Paris-Dakar Rally	Acclaim	●●	53
Phantom Brave	NIS America	●●●●◖	85
Pirates: The Legend of Black Kat	EA Games	●●●◖	55
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	Activision	●●	80
The Polar Express	THQ	●●●	88
Pool Paradise	Ignition	●●●◖	83
Portal Runner	3DO	●●	50
Power Drome	Mud Duck	●	84
Power Rangers: Dino Thunder	THQ	●●	88
The Powerpuff Girls: Relish Rampage	Bam	●●	65
Pride FC	THQ	●●●●	65
Primal	Sony CEA	●●●●	68
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	**Ubisoft**	**●●●●●**	**75**
Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	●●●●	88
Pro Race Driver	Codemasters	●●●●◖	65
Project Eden	Eidos	●●●◖	52
Pryzm Chapter One: The Dark Unicorn	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	60
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	●●●●◖	82
P.T.O. IV	Koei	●●●	66
Q-Ball Billiards Master	Take-Two	●●●◖	40
Quake III Revolution	EA Games	●●●●◖	44
R: Racing Evolution	Namco	●●●●	76
R-Type Final	Eidos/Fresh Games	●●●●	78
Rally Fusion: Race of Champions	Activision	●●●	64
Rapala Pro Fishing	Activision	●●◖	85
Ratchet & Clank	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**63**
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**75**
⚡Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	**Sony CEA**	**●●●●●**	**87**

Nothing enhances your gaming experience like an alternate costume for the game's hero, right? The following codes will give you both an alternate costume and an enhanced laser sword.

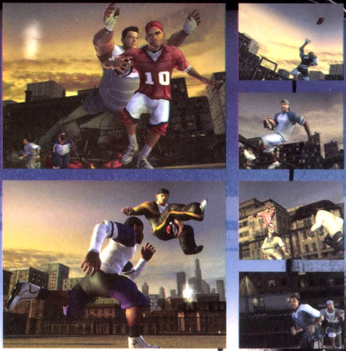
MIX IT UP

Looking for a simple music-creation tool in the vein of the first *MTV Music Generator* on PS1? *Music Maker* is a more faithful successor than either of the *MTV* sequels; it's easier to use, more streamlined, and generally more intuitive.

STREET SMARTS

Check out page 94 for our review of *NBA Street V3*. Seriously, check it out. Why are you still reading this? Geez, make a joke about microwaving games and half the country sets its kitchens on fire; tell people to flip back a few pages and they just sit there.

SHOCKEY
XZIBIT



SHOCKING XZIBIT-ION

THE COVER BOYS OF NFL STREET 2 TALK FOOTBALL

Musicians and athletes tend to mix primarily at parties, but *NFL Street 2* has them mixing on the cover of EA Big's latest urban football experience. New York Giants tight end Jeremy Shockey co-covers with *Pimp My Ride*'s Xzibit. We caught up with the pair to talk EA and NFL in NYC.

OPM What's it mean to be on *Street 2*'s cover?
XZIBIT It's an honor, man—a compliment to be recognized, to be tapped to be on the cover of such a prestigious game. These games come out and go around the world. To be the face of that, the voice of that, it feels good to be commended.
JEREMY SHOCKEY Hundreds of thousands of kids will be playing this game. It's definitely exciting to be on the cover. I could never imagine being a little kid [and] being on the cover of a videogame.

OPM What jersey did you wear when you were playing as a kid?
JS Didn't have no jerseys back then.
X Jerseys! Ha. We couldn't afford jerseys.
JS But if I had a jersey, it'd probably be Bo Jackson. He was a playmaker. Whatever he did changed the game.

OPM *Madden*'s so big. How are you going to get them away from it to play your game?
JS This game, you can do anything you want to. Jump off walls—it's stuff you can't do in *Madden*.
X It's fun like *NBA Street 2*, where you can do dunks and things you can't do in a regulation game. So it gives you an alternative to *Madden*.

OPM Any game-related anecdotes?
JS In the locker room, in training camp, that's when you play most of your games. I get a laugh out of it to see how upset people get when they lose a game or to see how much money got bet. There've been people walking away with thousands and thousands of dollars after 10 or 20 or 30 minutes of time. It's our competitive nature on and off the field. These athletes in camp bet cars, necklaces, watches. It's pretty hardcore.
X Ha, I'd like to be in the NFL.

OPM Give us some players from your *NFL Street 2* dream team.
JS Michael Vick would be a good candidate for that one.
X I'd take McNair.
JS Receivers, I'd take Terrell Owens.
X Man, you takin' all the good players. I'll take Lenny Kravitz.
JS I'd take Chad Johnson, someone that's real outspoken.

OPM So guys like you, basically?
JS Somebody who's going to score and let the crowd know it—[pull out] a sign or put a cell phone in the goalpost. It's good for the game and definitely good for *NFL Street*.
X Gotta love that. I'd take Li'l John, 'cause he's low to the ground.

> "THE ATHLETES IN CAMP BET CARS, NECKLACES, WATCHES."

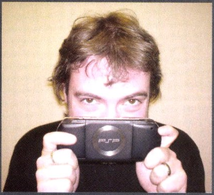
JS What about Suge Knight? He used to play ball.
X Yeah! Put some excitement in the game.

OPM So nowadays Maylay's in *GTA*, there's *Def Jam Fight for NY*. Do you think the hip-hop infusion in games is going to continue?
X I think the music is definitely a big part of games now. Sports, videogames, and music are all tied in together—it's the same audience. And it just so happens that it can be packaged into the perfect games, and the marriage works. It works for the games and for the artists. The exposure all the way around is great.

OPM So you two are working on an album together, right?
X [*Laughs*] You didn't know?
JS He's actually going to play for the Giants, and I'm going to be the artist.
X No, no. I actually like the way my stuff works. It'll be one play and I'm out for good. « *Todd Zuniga*

PSP IS STILL COMING IN MARCH

THEY JUST WANT TO KEEP US ON OUR TOES, I GUESS



On page 25 you'll find our extensive first look at the launch lineup for the PSP. Oddly, Sony chose not to reveal its launch plans at CES in Las Vegas in January, which led to some wild speculation as to whether we really would see the system hit stores in March. Our friends at Sony, ensconced in their underground lair under a mountain in the Nevada desert, assure us that there is no way the thing won't be out in March. So don't panic. The lack of details is apparently more about wanting to make a big impact with regards to availability, than it is about obfuscation. "PSP? What on *Earth* is that? We have no idea what you're talking about." Check www.1UP.com during February, as we're sure you'll see news sooner than later.

Aside from our now-monthly PSP giddiness, this issue is all about shooters. There's no doubt that it's the genre of choice right now, and there are a lot of exceptional games coming between now and the summer. The star of our cover and DVD, *Area 51*, is worthy of particular note, and you can read all about it on page 86. « *John Davison*

THE OPM FAMILY

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DANA JONGEWAARD is distraught, for it's happening again. First it was the *Tetris* L-block. Then it was the shimmering gems from *Bejeweled*. Now it's the four-block, dual-tone squares of PSP's *Lumines* that dance around inside her brain every time she closes her eyes.

JOE RYBICKI was so smitten with the Mac Mini that he ordered one as soon as it was announced. Then he fashioned a stand-in out of cardboard, wax paper, Elmer's glue, and rubber bands to tide him over until the unit actually arrives. And no, we're not making that up.

SCOOTERILLA, mayor of Gorilla-tropolis in the year 6482, traveled back in time using a totally rad DeLorean. After telling his ancestor—Scooter 2005—that after a very long wait, *Xenosaga Episode VI: Braccae Tuae Aperiuntur* is totally worth it, he got back into his rad DeLorean and went back to the future.

GIANCARLO VARANINI finally got his PSP. While he didn't have to resort to fighting any sort of ill-mannered juggling jungle animals riding atop motorcycles, he did have to spend half of his life savings and donate his kidneys to get it. Who needs 'em anyway. Stupid kidneys.

LOGAN PARR is counting down the days till the U.S. launch of the PSP. With awesome games, Wi-Fi multiplayer, and music-playin' goodness, he just can't wait. Giancarlo still won't let Logan play with his Japanese PSP but has finally allowed him to at least hold the box it came in.

RYAN VULK has a solution to end all of his dental woes. He plans to wrestle down all manner of animals with big teeth (for example, grizzly bears, ligers, and walruses), and then call in his dental hygienist girlfriend to extract said teeth so he can create the world's most magnificent maw.

ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA is touring northern Europe with his electro-polka band "Awesome G.O.D.," which he assembled while in prison. Their secret mission is to stop Larsky "The Snake" Welch and his band of sweet-talking neo-yogis from taking over Pink Town...and the world.

TODD ZUNIGA is recuperating from the shock of the sell-your-soul pact between the NFL and EA. Newly 30 years old, he's having hard time seeing the light of such an agreement. Luckily, he's already declared *Winning Eleven 8* his Game of the Year, so he's happily focusing on "real" football.

ZOE FLOWER is an infamous columnist and passionate blogger discovered by *OPM* during an excursion to the North Pole five years ago. She enjoys playing games that don't use too much beige. Currently Zoe can be found charming the local EB staff to ensure she gets a PSP before anyone else.

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THE SPORTS GUY

MONOPOLY PARTY

TODD ZUNIGA
is a former *OPM* staffer turned freelance writer. If you have a question about sports games, want a prediction, or just disagree, mail him at thesportsguy@ziffdavis.com.

I'm in shock. Jaw-dropped, calling friends and opening with "Are you kidding me?"

With an announcement that stunned the Sports Guy, Electronic Arts has signed a five-year deal with the NFL that gives *Madden* exclusive rights to all NFL players and teams. Exclusive. Meaning that no other football game outside of EA's will feature licensed players.

Which ultimately means: Sayonara, *ESPN NFL 2K6*. Most recently, the series was viewed as a fantastic alternative to the *Madden* marketing monster. But now ESPN's little football game that could, which made its mark with a wallet-friendly $20 price tag, is now simply the little football game that won't be allowed to.

What's happened here is that EA has daringly (and no doubt, expensively) created a sports monopoly, thwarting the potential of any competition. This is a bad thing. I love EA Sports games, with their sharp looks and iterative feature sets. And *Madden* is inarguably the most complete sports game being made right now. But my guess is that the tight-lipped populace at Tiburon would say that competing with the *ESPN NFL 2K* series has been a very good thing. I even believe *ESPN NFL*'s marketplace presence has ensured *Madden*'s success.

The ickiest part about this rich-get-richer deal is that it doesn't seem like a necessary move for the EA powerhouse, but instead a demeaning show of financial force. Not only did *Madden* outsell and outearn *ESPN* (even while selling for $30 more), but ESPN Videogames didn't even expect their football effort to be a positive in terms of the companies' bottom lines this year or next. Was *ESPN*'s slim market share that threatening?

Consider the outlandish cost of such a deal, and understand that it could actually drive up the cost of *Madden* next year. Sound crazy? Just think about how the No Fun League has sopped up money this year. January: $400 million from Visa for six years. February: $500 million from Gatorade for eight years. In March, PepsiCo paid $560 million to use the NFL shield on its products. This December payoff from EA, and I'm speculating here, could be greater than these previous deals when you factor in *Madden*'s annual profitability. Who's behind the scenes with NFL commish Paul Tagliabue? Gordon Gekko, whispering "Greed is good"?

The ultimate question: How will this affect the *Madden* franchise? Poorly. Why would a profit-driven, publicly owned entertainment empire spend more money than it has to? In good faith? Unlikely. Consider that on Metacritic.com, *Madden* scored around 95 every year that *ESPN NFL* was a realistic threat, but this year—after brutally pounding *ESPN* in sales and ultimately eliminating it (until *ESPN*'s price dropped)—*Madden* slipped to a 91. When there was no serious competition on PS2 right after the system launched, *Madden*'s feature set was way more limited than in seasons when *ESPN NFL* was around. I know *Madden* will continue to wow—of course it will—but we'll never know what could've been, what massive strides EA would've taken out of fear of slipping behind *ESPN NFL*. «

> I BELIEVE ESPN NFL'S PRESENCE HAS ENSURED MADDEN'S SUCCESS.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Sweet! To use these codes, first pause the game.			
Double-bladed laser sword			
Circle, Square, Circle, Square, Up, Down, Left, Left			
Change Quark's outfit			
Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Circle, Circle, Square			
Rayman 2: Revolution	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**41**
Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubisoft	●●●◖	67
Rayman Arena	Ubisoft	●●●◖	57
RC Revenge Pro	Acclaim	●●◖	41
Ready 2 Rumble Boxing Round 2	Midway	●●●●	40
Real Pool	Infogrames	●●●◖	40
Red Card Soccer 20-03	Midway	●●●	57
Red Dead Revolver	Rockstar	●●●●	82
Red Faction	**THQ**	●●●●●	**46**
Red Faction II	THQ	●●●●	63
Reel Fishing III	Natsume	●●●●	72
Reign of Fire	Bam	●●●◖	63
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	**Capcom**	●●●●◖	**48**
Resident Evil: Dead Aim	Capcom	●●●◖	70
Resident Evil Outbreak	Capcom	●●●◖	81
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: OR	Activision	●●●◖	71
Rez	Sega	●●●●◖	53
Ribbit King	Bandai	●●●	82
Ridge Racer V	Namco	●●●●◖	38
Riding Spirits	Bam	●●●◖	61
Ring of Red	Konami	●●●●	43
Rise to Honor	**Sony CEA**	●●●	**78**
⚡Risk: Global Domination	Atari	●●●●	73
RLH: Run Like Hell	Interplay	●●●	62
Road Kill	Midway	●●●●	74
Road Trip	Conspiracy	●●●●	61
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown	Capcom	●●◖	74
Robotech: Invasion	Global Star	●●●	86
Rocky	Ubisoft	●●●●	64
Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	●●◖	87
Robot Alchemic Drive	Enix	●●●●	63
Robotech: Battlecry	TDK	●●●◖	62
Rogue Ops	Kemco	●●◖	75
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VII	Koei	●●◖	60
Romance of the Three Kingdoms VIII	Koei	●●●	73
RPG Maker 2	Agetec	●●●◖	74
RTX Red Rock	LucasArts	●●	71
Rugby	EA Sports	●●●◖	48
Rugby 2004	EA Sports	●●●	73
Rumble Racing	EA Games	●●●●◖	45
Rumble Roses	Konami	●●●	88
Rune: Viking Warlord	Take-Two	●●◖	48
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	●●●●◖	64
Salt Lake 2002	Eidos	●●◖	55
Samurai Jack: The Shadow of Aku	Sega	●●●●	80
Samurai Warriors	Koei/EA	●●●●	81
Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei	●●●	88
Saturday Night Speedway	Atari	●●◖	81
Savage Skies	Bam	●●●	56
Scaler	Global Star	●●●●	88
Scooby-Doo! Mystery Mayhem	THQ	●●●	81
Scooby-Doo! Night of 100 Frights	**THQ**	●●●	**58**
The Scorpion King: Rise of the Akkadian	Universal	●●	62
SD Gundam Force: Showdown!	Bandai	●●●◖	88
Second Sight	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Secret Weapons Over Normandy	LucasArts	●●●●	75
Seek and Destroy	Conspiracy	●●●◖	66
Sega Bass Fishing Duel	Sega	●●●	62
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega Sports	●●	62
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega Sports	●●●●◖	60
Sega Superstars	Sega	●●●●	88
⚡Serious Sam: Next Encounter	Global Star	●●●◖	81
Seven Samurai 20XX	Sammy	●●	80
Shadow Hearts	Midway	●●●●	52
Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	●●●●	86
Shadow of Destiny	Konami	●●●◖	43
Shadow of Rome	Capcom	●●●●	89
Shadow Man: 2econd Coming	Acclaim	●●	57
Shaman King: Power of Spirit	Konami	●●◖	89
Shark Tale	Activision	●●◖	88
Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder	Activision	●●◖	52
ShellShock: Nam '67	Eidos	●●	85
Unlimited ammo, god mode, and even an acid-trip mode are the codes we have for *ShellShock: Nam '67*. Now you can rewrite history as your choice of Rambo or Jimi Hendrix. Just say no! Enter these codes at the Title screen to get their effects:			
Acid-trip mode			
Up, R2, Circle, Left, Triangle, Square, L2, L1, Circle, R1			
God mode			
R3, L3, Right, Left, L1, R1, R3, L3, Right, Left, L1, R1			
Infinite ammo			
R2, R1, Triangle, L2, L1, Up, R2, R1, Triangle, L2, L1, Up			
Shifters	3DO	●	58
Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne	Atlus	●●●●◖	86
Shinobi	Sega	●●●◖	63
Showdown: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim	●◖	83
Shox	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	63
Shrek 2	Activision	●●●◖	82
Shrek Super Party	TDK Mediactive	●●◖	64
Siren	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Silent Hill 2	**Konami**	●●●●◖	**50**
Silent Hill 3	Konami	●●●●◖	71
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	●●●●◖	85
Silent Line: Armored Core	Agetec	●●●◖	70
Silent Scope	Konami	●●●	39
Silent Scope 2	Konami	●●●◖	49
Silent Scope 3	Konami	●●●◖	62

HOLY SHINOBI!
When Sam Kennedy reviewed *Shinobi* for *OPM*, he dubbed the game one of the most frustrating experiences ever (and we dubbed him Mr. Dirty Mouth). What's your nomination for Most Frustrating Game? Send us an e-mail at opm@ziffdavis.com.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Silpheed: The Lost Planet	Working Designs	●●●◖	40
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	●●●●	72
The Simpsons: Road Rage	**EA Games**	●●●	**52**
The Simpsons Skateboarding	EA Games	●◖	64
The Sims	EA Games	●●●●	65
⚡The Sims: Bustin' Out	EA Games	●●●●◖	76
Sitting Ducks	Hip Interactive	●●●	88
Sky Gunner	Atlus	●●●◖	58
Sky Odyssey	Activision	●●●	40
Sled Storm	EA Sports Big	●●●◖	55
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**62**
Sly 2: Band of Thieves	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**86**

The best thieves know how to leave the scene in a hurry. Enter the code provided to put a little pep in Sly's step. Enter this code by pressing Start and then pressing the following keys:

Left, Left, Down, Right, Left, Right — Unlocks time gadget

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Smash Cars	Metro3D	●●●◖	71
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament	Namco	●●●◖	56
Smash Court Tennis: Pro Tournament 2	Namco	●●●●	82
Smuggler's Run	**Rockstar**	●●●●◖	**39**
Smuggler's Run 2: Hostile Territory	Rockstar	●●●●◖	52
Soccer America: International Cup	Hot-B	●●	48
Soccer Mania	EA/Lego	●●●◖	59
⚡SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**60**
⚡SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**75**
Soldier of Fortune	Majesco	●●●	52
Sonic Heroes	Sega	●●	77
Sonic Mega Collection	Sega	●●●	88
Soul Calibur II	**Namco**	●●●●●	**72**
Soul Reaver 2	Eidos	●●●	52
Space Channel 5 Special Edition	Sega	●●●◖	75
Space Race	Infogrames	●●◖	59
Spawn Armageddon	Namco	●◖	76
Speed Kings	Acclaim	●●●●	70
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy	THQ	●●●◖	75
Spider-Man	**Activision**	●●●●◖	**57**
Spider-Man 2	Activision	●●●◖	84
Splashdown	Infogrames	●●●●	52
Splashdown: Rides Gone Wild	**THQ**	●●●●●	**72**
SpongeBob SquarePants: Battle for Bikini Bottom	THQ	●●●●◖	75
SpongeBob SquarePants: The Movie	THQ	●●●●◖	87
Spy Fiction	Sammy	●●	85
SpyHunter	**Midway**	●●●●◖	**50**
SpyHunter 2	Midway	●●●	76
Spyro: Enter the Dragonfly	**Vivendi Universal**	●●●	**64**
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi Universal	●●	87
⚡SRS: Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	●●●	64
SSX	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**38**
SSX Tricky	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**52**
⚡SSX 3	**EA Sports Big**	●●●●●	**74**
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time	Square Enix	●●●●	84
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	TDK	●●	75
Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force	Majesco	●●◖	53
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	●●●●◖	86

OPM leads to codes. Codes lead to cheating. Cheating leads to the dark side. The allure to cheat is something all Jedi face. However, be strong. Do not give in to the dark side. Do not use this code to unlock all planets.

Go to the Planet Selection screen and enter Square, Circle, Square, Circle.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Star Wars Bounty Hunter	**LucasArts**	●●●	**64**
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	●●●	65
Star Wars Super Bombad Racing	LucasArts	●●	45
Star Wars Jedi Starfighter	LucasArts	●●●◖	56
Star Wars Racer Revenge	LucasArts	●●●●◖	55
Star Wars Starfighter	**LucasArts**	●●●●◖	**43**
Starsky & Hutch	Gotham Games	●●	74
State of Emergency	**Rockstar**	●●●	**55**
Stitch: Experiment 626	Sony CEA	●●◖	59
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	●●●●	84
Street Fighter EX 3	Capcom	●●●◖	39
Street Hoops	**Activision**	●●●◖	**60**
Stretch Panic	Conspiracy	●●●◖	47
Strike Force Bowling	Crave	●◖	82
Stuntman	**Infogrames/Atari**	●●●	**59**
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	●●●●	62
The Suffering	Midway	●●●	80
Suikoden III	Konami	●●●	63

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Suikoden IV	Konami	●●●	89
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	Acclaim	●●●◖	72
Summoner	THQ	●●●	39
Summoner 2	THQ	●●●◖	62
Sunny Garcia Surfing	Ubisoft	●●●◖	51
Super Bust-A-Move	Acclaim	●●●	41
Super Bust-A-Move 2	Ubisoft	●●●◖	63
Super Trucks Racing	XS Games	●◖	76
Supercar Street Challenge	Activision	●●◖	52
Superman: Shadow of Apokolips	Atari	●●●◖	63
Surfing H30	Rockstar	●●	40
SWAT: Global Strike Team	Sierra	●●●	74
Swing Away Golf	EA Games	●●●	38
⚡Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony CEA	●●●	81
Taiko: Drum Master	Namco	●●●●	87
Tak and the Power of Juju	**THQ**	●●●◖	**75**
Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams	THQ	●●●◖	88
Tarzan: Untamed	Ubisoft	●●●◖	52
Taz: Wanted	Infogrames	●●●◖	60
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	Konami	●●◖	75
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	Konami	●	86
Tekken 4	**Namco**	●●●◖	**61**
Tekken Tag Tournament	**Namco**	●●●●◖	**39**
Technic Beat	Mastiff	●●●	89
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	●●●	67
The Terminator: Dawn of Fate	Atari	●●◖	63
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Atari	●◖	77
Terminator 3: The Redemption	Atari	●●●◖	86
Test Drive	**Infogrames**	●●●◖	**58**
Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open	Infogrames	●●●	48
Test Drive: Eve of Destruction	Atari	●●●●	85
Tetris Worlds	THQ	●●	57
Theme Park Roller Coaster	EA Games	●●●●	41
The Thing	Universal	●●●	62
Thunderstrike: Operation Phoenix	Eidos	●◖	52
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2001	EA Sports	●●●	44
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2002	EA Sports	●●●●	55
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	EA Sports	●●●●◖	63
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	**EA Sports**	●●●●●	**73**
⚡Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	EA Sports	●●●●◖	86
Time Crisis 2	Namco	●●●●	49
Time Crisis 3	Namco	●●●●◖	74
Time Crisis: Crisis Zone	Namco	●●●◖	86
TimeSplitters	**Eidos**	●●●●●	**39**
TimeSplitters 2	**Eidos**	●●●●●	**63**
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	●●●●	86
Tokyo Xtreme Racer 3	Crave	●●	76
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	●●◖	45
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	●●●◖	65
⚡Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	**Ubisoft**	●●●◖	**78**
⚡Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	●●●●	80
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	●●●●◖	68
⚡Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	**Ubisoft**	●●●●●	**82**
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	**Eidos**	●●	**72**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	**Activision**	●●●●●	**51**
⚡Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	**Activision**	●●●●●	**63**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground	**Activision**	●●●●●	**76**
⚡Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	●●●●◖	87
Top Angler	Xicat	●●●◖	57
Top Gear Dare Devil	Kemco	●●●◖	41
Top Gun: Combat Zones	Titus	●●●	50
Total Immersion Racing	Empire	●	66
Transformers	Atari	●●●◖	81
Transworld Surf	Infogrames	●●●◖	57
⚡Tribes: Aerial Assault	Sierra	●●●◖	62
Triple Play 2002	EA Sports	●●	55
Triple Play Baseball	EA Sports	●●	45
⚡Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged	Atari	●●	81
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	**Activision**	●●	**76**
Tsugunai: Atonement	Atlus	●●●	53
Turok: Evolution	Acclaim	●◖	62
Twisted Metal: Black	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**47**
⚡Twisted Metal: Black Online	Sony CEA	●●●●	61
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger	EA Games	●●●	62
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue	EA Games	●●●●	88
UEFA Euro 2004	EA Sports	●●●●◖	82
UFC Throwdown	Crave	●●●◖	58
UFC Sudden Impact	Crave	●●●◖	82

COASTER CRAZY

Here's yet another lesser-known *Sims*-style management game: *Theme Park Roller Coaster*. If you're looking for a more exciting god game, though, check out *Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis*. It's a theme-park sim with rampaging dinosaurs. Yeah!

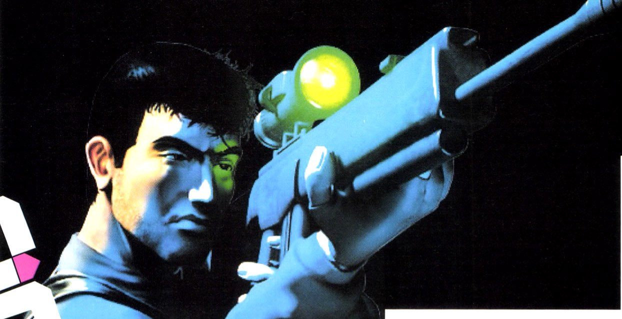
VEHICULAR MANSLAUGHTER

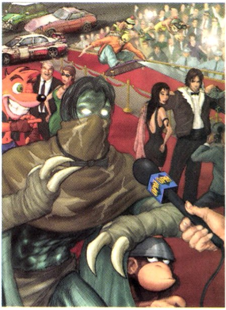
Originally, you could only get *Twisted Metal: Black Online* by mailing in a certificate included with your Network Adapter. Now the game is packaged with the Greatest Hits version of *TMB*, so if you're dying for online car combat, check it out.

GAME	PUBLISHER	SCORE	ISSUE
Under the Skin	Capcom	●●●◖	86
Unison	Tecmo	●●●◖	44
Unlimited Saga	Square Enix	●●	70
Unreal Tournament	Infogrames	●●◖	40
The Urbz: Sims in the City	EA Games	●●●◖	88
V-Rally 3	Infogrames	●●●●◖	64
Vampire Night	Namco	●●◖	52
Van Helsing	Vivendi Universal	●●●◖	82
Vexx	Acclaim	●●	67
Victorious Boxers	Empire	●●●◖	51
⚡Vietcong: Purple Haze	Global Star	●◖	88
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	●●●●◖	85
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	●●●●	88
Virtua Fighter 4	**Sega**	●●●●●	**55**
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	**Sega**	●●●●●	**72**
Virtua Quest	Sega	●●	89
Virtual on Marz	Sega	●●	76
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	●●●●◖	70
Wallace & Gromit in Project Zoo	Bam	●●●	74
War Jetz	3DO	●●◖	48
War of the Monsters	**Sony CEA**	●●●●●	**64**
⚡Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior	THQ	●●◖	74
Warriors of Might & Magic	3DO	●●◖	44
Wave Rally	Eidos	●◖	53
Way of the Samurai	Bam	●●●◖	59
Way of the Samurai 2	Capcom	●●●	82
Wheel of Fortune	Atari	●●◖	76
Whiplash	Eidos	●●●◖	76
Whirl Tour	Vivendi Universal	●●	63
Whiteout	Konami	●	65
Wild Arms 3	Sony CEA	●●●◖	62
Wild Wild Racing	Interplay	●●●	39
Winback	Koei	●●●●	43
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	●●●●◖	57
Wizardry: Tale of the Forsaken Land	Atlus	●●●	53
Woody Woodpecker: Buzz Buzzard Park	DreamCatcher	●●●	57
⚡World Championship Pool 2004	Jaleco	●●●◖	76
World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks	3DO	●●●	42
World of Outlaws: Sprint Cars	Infogrames	●●●●	55
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	●●●●	67
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6 Int'l	**Konami**	●●●●●	**67**
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 7 Int'l	**Konami**	●●●●●	**78**
World Tour Soccer 2002	Sony CEA	●●●●	53
World Tour Soccer 2003	Sony CEA	●●●●	65
⚡World Tour Soccer 2004	Sony CEA	●●●	80
Wrath Unleashed	LucasArts	●◖	78
WRC: World Rally Championship	**Bam**	●●●●●	**57**
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions	Activision	●●	63
WTA Tour Tennis	Konami	●	57
WWE Crush Hour	THQ	●●◖	68
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	**THQ**	●●●◖	**76**
WWE SmackDown! Just Bring It	**THQ**	●●●◖	**52**
WWE SmackDown! Shut Your Mouth	**THQ**	●●◖	**64**
⚡WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw	THQ	●●●◖	88
X Squad	EA Games	●●●◖	38
The X-Files: Resist or Serve	Vivendi Universal	●●◖	81
X-Men Legends	Activision	●●●●	87
X-Men: Next Dimension	Activision	●●●	64
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	Activision	●●●	69
Xenosaga: Episode 1—Der Wille Zur Macht	Namco	●●●●	66
XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association	Acclaim	●●●●◖	74
⚡XIII	Ubisoft	●●●◖	75
Yanya Caballista: City Skater	Koei	●●●◖	49
Yu-Gi-Oh! The Duelists of the Roses	Konami	●●◖	67
Yu-Gi-Oh! Capsule Monster Coliseum	Konami	●●●	88
Yu Yu Hakusho: Dark Tournament	Atari	●●◖	88
Zapper	Infogrames	●●◖	64
ZOE: Zone of the Enders	Konami	●●●●◖	44
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	●●●●◖	68

GET YOUR GAME REVIEW PRINTED

If you'd like to write a review for a recent game and see it in print in an internationally distributed magazine, now's your chance! Send your best efforts to opm@ziff-davis.com with the subject "READER REVIEW" and you may be selected to appear in a future edition of Replay.





REWIND

FIVE YEARS AGO IN OPM

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
Syphon Filter 2

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

Meanwhile, in the world beyond games:

The NASDAQ was breaking 5,000 as Alan Greenspan frantically tried to get Wall Street to back off the dot-com stocks; George W. Bush and Al Gore were winning their respective parties' presidential nominations; 55 Oscars had gone missing; and tobacco companies were being sued by smokers. Where were you?

LET'S GET SLOW

The first couple months of the year are traditionally a time for quiet reflection, a tradition enthusiastically embraced by the videogame industry since, well, forever. March of 2000 was no exception to this depressingly slow postholiday period.

LOGAN'S RUN

One of the few big games...scratch that—the *only* big game to be found at the time was, not coincidentally, the subject of our cover story: *Syphon Filter 2*. We examined the past, present, and future of the franchise in our six-page feature. We also got gimmicky with a "decoder" (in reality a rectangle of transparent, red plastic) that could be used to view "scrambled transmissions" on the cover and within the feature that revealed hints for the game and other types of privileged information. Yeah, we're a bunch of dorks.

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

In 2000, we waited until the March issue before revealing our choices for the 1999 *OPM* Editors' Awards. Game of the Year was *Gran Turismo 2* (buggy as it was), with *CTR: Crash Team Racing*, *Final Fantasy VIII*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, and *Ape Escape* all runners-up. Other interesting winners included *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver* for Best Adventure Game, *Lunar: Silver Star Story Complete* for Best Story, and *Ballistic* for Best Puzzle Game (hey, it was a really slow year for puzzle games).

REVIEWS HIGHLIGHTS

Remember how we were saying that the time right after the holidays is a really slow period? Get this: The highest-rated games in March 2000 were *Colin McRae Rally* and *Silent Bomber*, at four discs each. *Silent Bomber*! A game that sold fewer than 10,000 units in its entire life cycle. Wow.

REVIEWS LOWLIGHTS

The big stinkers in March 2000 were wrestling travesty *ECW Hardcore Revolution* and 2D-fighter-gone-3D *Fatal Fury: Wild Ambition*. *ECW* was the real surprise, though, considering that Acclaim's previous wrestling titles had been fairly well received. Was this the beginning of the end for the now-defunct company? No, probably not.

DEMO MADNESS

Fortunately, this issue had a really solid demo disc to help ease the pain of the postholiday lull: *Syphon Filter 2*, *Crash Team Racing*, *Spyro 2*, *Twisted Metal 4*, *Ace Combat 3*, and *MTV Music Generator* joined the blockbuster *Silent Bomber* as playable demos.

CHART TOPPERS

Gran Turismo 2 debuted atop the charts in the March 2000 issue, to the surprise of absolutely no one. *Tony Hawk* and *NBA Live* stayed strong in the top five, too; the only moves that proved even slightly surprising were *Tomorrow Never Dies* jumping six spots to No. 2 and *Spyro* muscling its way into the No. 5 slot, knocking *Spyro 2* all the way down to No. 11. «

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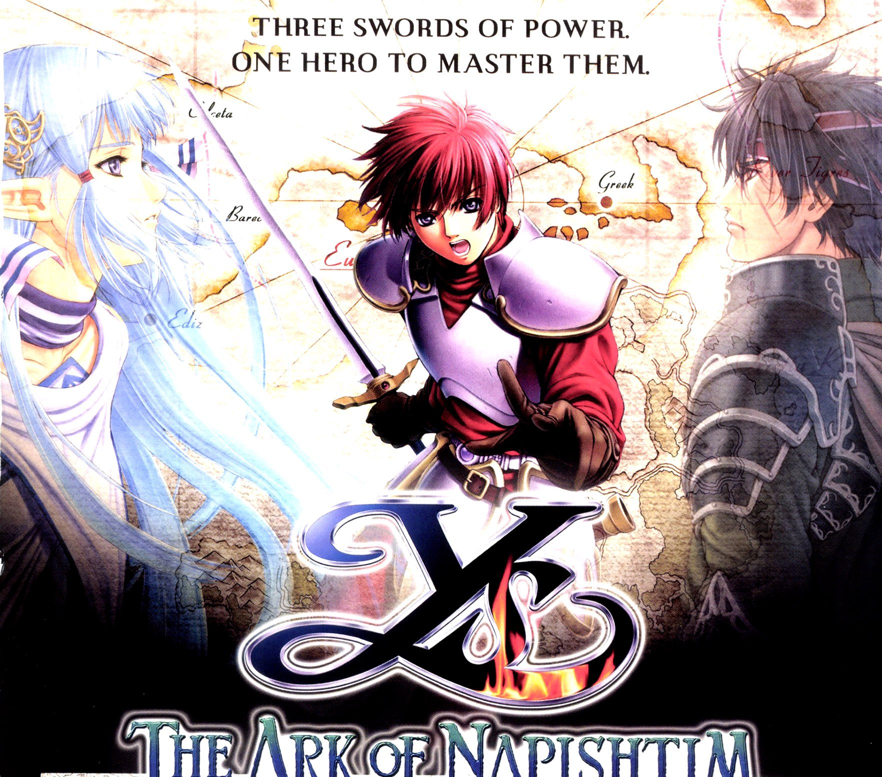
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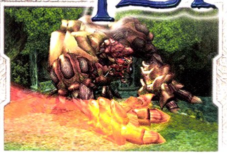

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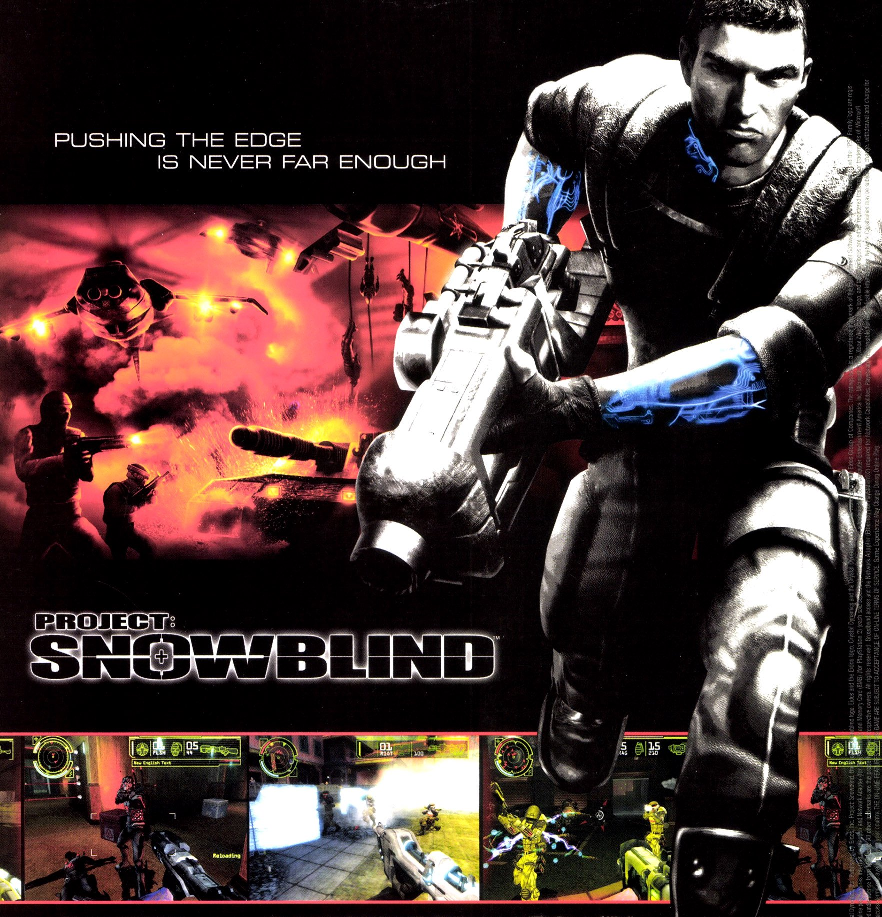

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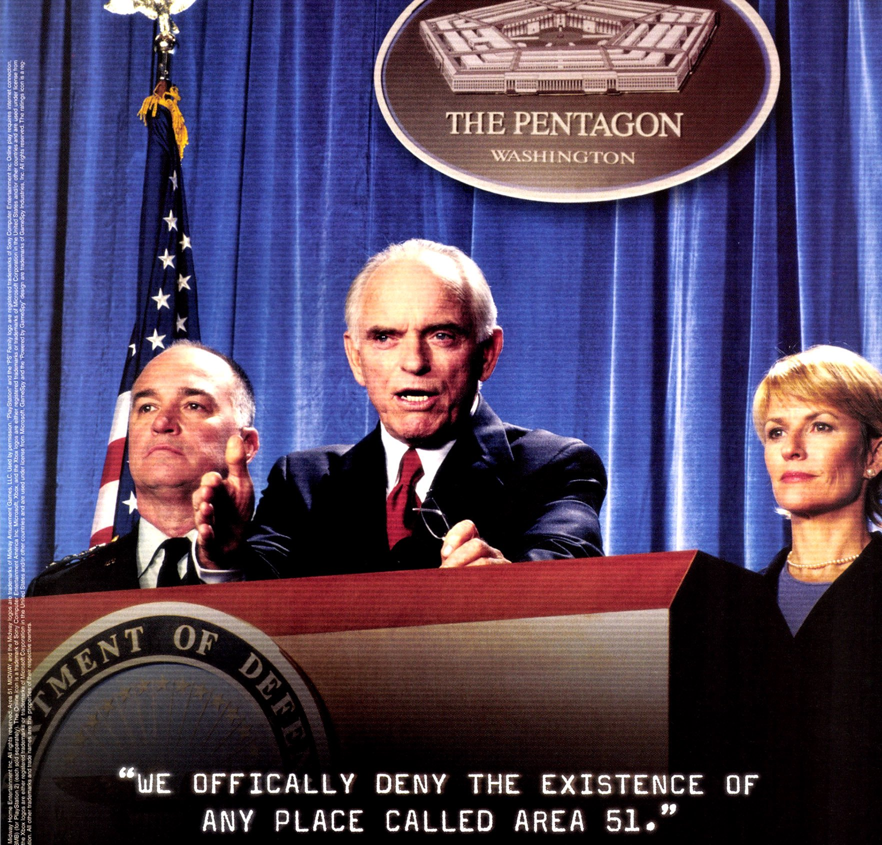
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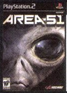
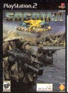


AREA 51

Check out the game featured in our cover story up close and in person. And for a complete walkthrough of the demo, flip on over to page 93.



SOCOM II

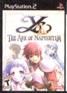
What could be better than exclusive maps? How about exclusive maps plus all of *SOCOM II*'s unlockable content? It's all there on the disc.

THE PUNISHER

You are big, you are powerful, and you are one pissed-off dude. Well, not in real life, but you can be if you give this demo a spin.

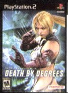
ESPN NHL 2K5

Still no professional hockey season, kids, but now you can have your own high-sticking goodness for free with this handy demo.



YS VI

It's not pronounced "yizz"; it's pronounced "ease." Play the demo on this disc, then turn to page 101 and see what we thought of the game.



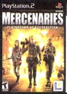
DEATH BY DEGREES

Did you know that the less that Nina's wearing, the more fluid her fighting moves are? If you don't believe us, just play the demo and see for yourself!

WATCH IT

PLUS...

Tenchu and *NFL Street 2* have pretty videos.

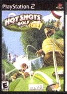


MERCENARIES

Last month we called this combination of wide-open environments and do-it-yourself action the first great game in the year 2005. Seeing is believing.

CHAMPIONS 2

Last year's surprise hack-n-slash hit returns with another round of bashing goodness that's prettier than ever. Don't believe us? Then look for yourself.



HOT SHOTS GOLF FORE!

Does Tiger Woods annoy you with his hot model wife and money and talent? Well, beat him at his own game (golf, dummy) with this nifty trick.

STOLEN

Spandex outfit, sneaky stalking moves, low-cut zippered tops—it all adds up to hot. Well, as long as it's not your 500-pound ex-girlfriend.

PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND TEAM

Demo Disc Producers
Gary Barth, Manuel Sousa, Jerome Strach, Chris Tan
Marketing Team
Steve Williams, Jesse Caid
Executive Producer
Andrew House
Format Q&A
Sam Bradley, DeMarlo King
Account Coordinator
Eric Ippolito

Programming and interface artwork by Lifelike Productions, Inc.
Lead Programmers
William Bohan, Ron Midthun, Avery Lodato
3D Artists Jason Robinson, Philip Williamson, David Hayes
Producer Jessi Harrison
President Katherine Williams
Technical Director Tim Edwards

SPECIAL THANKS
Maimoona Block, Kirsten Costello, Tom Gillan, Michelle Manahan, Gerald Martin, Jim Williams

DISC PROBLEMS?

Did you buy a copy of our magazine that did not contain a demo CD? Simply send the receipt in an envelope marked "OPM Replacement Disc" to OPM Disc Producer, Ziff Davis Media, 101 2nd Street, San Francisco, CA 94105, with the name and address of the store plus your phone number and address and we'll send you the disc. Make sure you specify which month the corresponding disc belongs to in order to ensure you get the right one.

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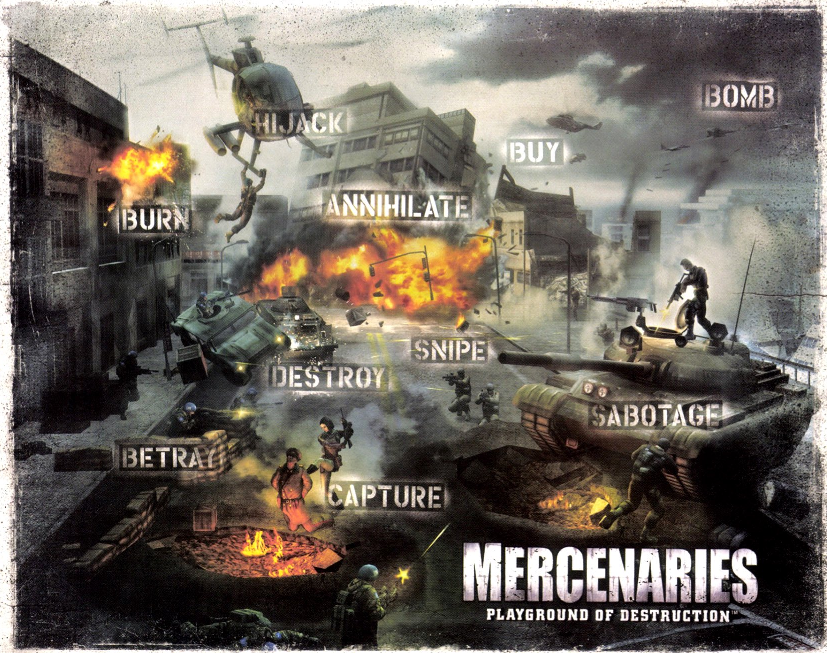
> ***"MERCENARIES RANKS AMONG THE BEST SEEN ON THE PS2."***
>
> **-GAMESPOT**

> ***"ONE OF THE FIRST TRULY SPECTACULAR & EPIC GAMES OF 2005."***
>
> **-OPM**



MERCENARIES

PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION™

TEEN
T
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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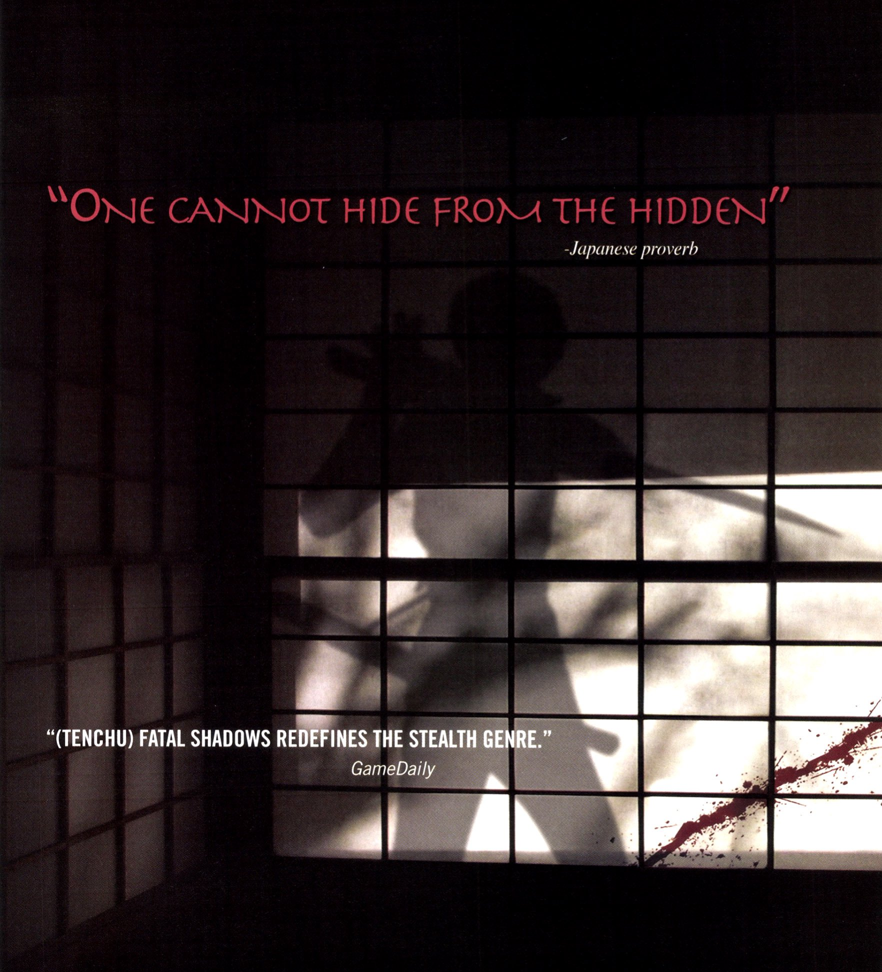
"ONE CANNOT HIDE FROM THE HIDDEN"
-Japanese proverb
"(TENCHU) FATAL SHADOWS REDEFINES THE STEALTH GENRE."
GameDaily

MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Violence
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PlayStation®2

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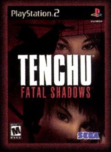
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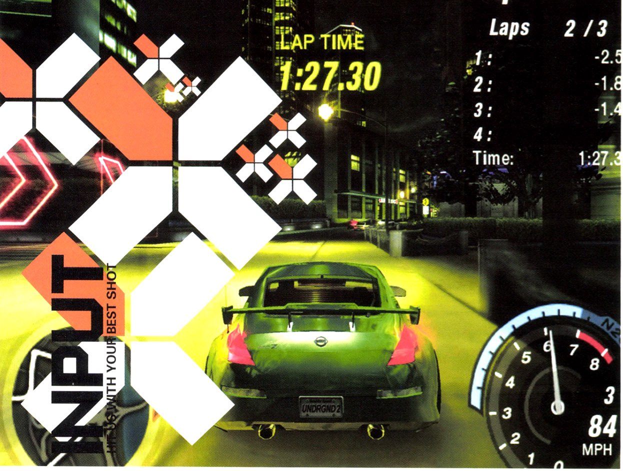
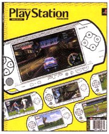
HIT US WITH YOUR BEST SHOT





LETTER OF THE MONTH

You know, I've been a gamer for quite some time now, and never have I been so disgusted and amazed both at the same time. What I am getting to is the product placement in *Need for Speed Underground 2*. This is probably the first time in videogame history that fast-food restaurants, aisle stores, and telephone companies have all made it into the game. At some point you just have to say no. Seeing the AutoZone and XMods billboards in *NFSU* didn't bother me that much. It's a racing game, so it makes sense to put car-mod-related ads in the game, but when it comes to having the Cingular Wireless logo on your screen the entire time you play, it just crosses that fine line between a videogame and an interactive ad. Or wait! What about the Best Buy and Burger King vinyls? Can't forget about those! Or referring to a mod shop by the name of restaurant and actually putting an ad in the text message? The reason for this might be getting sponsorship money, but come on, EA makes like $2.6 billion a year—do they really need more money?

I just wanted to let my thoughts out and show my regards to EA. I am not stating *NFSU2* is a bad game, just that the ads might take casual gamers out of the experience, as they did me.

Eric Lahaie
via e-mail

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RETAILER STRIKES BACK

I read the article "Videogames Get Mixed Grades" and was kinda disgusted at the part where they were bashing the retailers and saying it was really easy for underage kids to get games. I work in the electronics department at Wal-Mart #1731 in Geneva, NY, and let me tell you that we ask *everyone* who looks under the age of 25 for ID. We also properly explain the content of all Mature-rated games to parents and grandparents who are purchasing them. This is especially handy around Xmas time when kids just make a list and parents go out and buy what is on the list without knowing the content. We always tell them, "This is a Mature rated for such-and-such content," and with games like *GTA* we go even further into the content and what to expect. This not only prevents upset parents coming back later trying to return it when due to the copyright law they can only get the same item, but it also makes the parents aware of what the kids are playing. We get a lot of thanks for explaining the content, and if kids are being exposed to these games, it's because 80 percent of the time parents just shrug their shoulders at the content and say, "Oh well, they see worse on TV." So I just wanted to make everyone out in videogame land and especially Dr. Walsh aware that there are retailers who follow through with their promise, do not allow underage kids to get M-rated games, and make every consumer aware of the content in the games.

Maureen Stivers
via e-mail

We applaud you for being a responsible storeperson, and we sincerely hope that you become the standard instead of the exception. Alas, in our experience, people in retail tend to be shiftless teenage layabouts who give away M-rated games like the sweetest of candy, rather than responsible persons. Perhaps you can be a guiding light for retail now!

GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS

MONOPOL-EA

When EA tied up the NFL for an exclusive five-year deal, gamers got angry. Well, some of them did.

Take **DatMonkey**, for example, who said, "This blows, man! Last year's *NFL 2K5* was better in my opinion, and now I won't be able to play it with real NFL players because of f***ing EA?! I think I'm gonna boycott EA from now on."

Tealsmith agreed. "Without other football games to rival it, I don't see EA making any big additions to future *Madden* titles. After all, why would they need to? It's not like anyone else is challenging them."

"With no competition," added **knight_cloak**, "EA can crank out any lazily programmed NFL game they want, at any price, and it'll be pro football fans' only option for purchase."

GTChampion was a bit more philosophical: "Yeah...but who else does football as good as EA? I would be mad if, say, 989 were doing this, but not so much with EA because they do it right."

And **black_13** looked on the bright side, saying, "This could mean that we will finally see a CFL game. I'm very shocked as well, but while this is a very cheap move by EA, it's very smart."

ONLINE ACTION

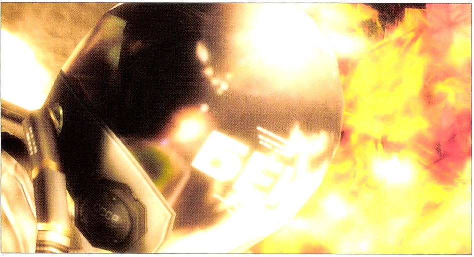
Is 2005 going to be a slow year for online games? It doesn't look that way to us, but some folks seem to think so.

"It's going to be the last run for PS2 in 2005," theorized **hunterlords**, "and I see more online stuff on Xbox then PS2. Some online features from PS2 games have been cut, and we could see a lack of online support for PS2."

"I remember reading an article that said that more people play *SOCOM II* alone than there are people who play on Xbox Live," countered **heavyd14**. "I think that says something."

"It seems like online support will be the same as always," **Death_Strikes** claimed. "If it's an FPS, it will have online. If it's some sort of tactical action game, it will be online."

CHILEN0 got right to the point: "OK, let's see: from the top of my head there's *TimeSplitters 3, Battlefield: Modern Combat, 25 to Life, Darkwatch, Area 51, Resident Evil Outbreak 2, Project: Snowblind, Cold Winter, Full Spectrum Warrior, Midnight Club 3, NBA Street V3, FIFA Street, Splinter Cell Chaos Theory,* and of course all the 2006 sports games. What do you think?"



FURIOUS VERBIAGE

I tried to translate the word on the Fury's helmet [*MGS3*]. Translated into the English alphabet it says Bei or Byei. However, I don't think I was able to see the whole word on his helmet from the screenshot. Because when I tried to translate it on the Internet, I got nothing. Maybe if you could give me the whole word, I can give you the English translation.

Steve Marley
via e-mail

According to Hideo Kojima himself, the word on his helmet means "fire" or "flame." So if anyone who knows Russian can tell us how to write either of those words in Russian, the mystery can be solved!

I GOT COOL IDEAS!

In a game magazine that I read a couple months ago, a reader wrote to the magazine staff and asked for a game company's address so he could ask questions or give suggestions about past/future games.

They did give him the info. Do game companies still do that? They should. If they still take suggestions, do you know (or know where I can obtain) the addresses for Konami, Capcom, EA, and Sony?

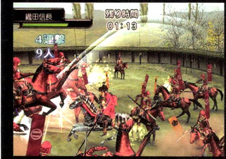
Ariol Limage
Deerfield Beach, FL

In pretty much any creative field, most places (like movie studios) have a blanket "no unsolicited ideas" policy. This is to protect them from receiving an idea ("a marmoset becomes a ninja and fights crime"), declining said idea, and then making a game/movie/book in which a ninja gibbon fights crime, and then being sued by the ninja marmoset person. So even if we did release that info, you wouldn't get anywhere. The most you can do is find the normal customer service address (from either the game's manual or the company's website) and send some comments there.

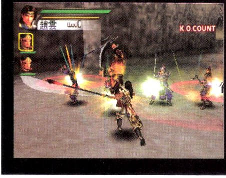
NEXT VERSE SAME AS THE FIRST

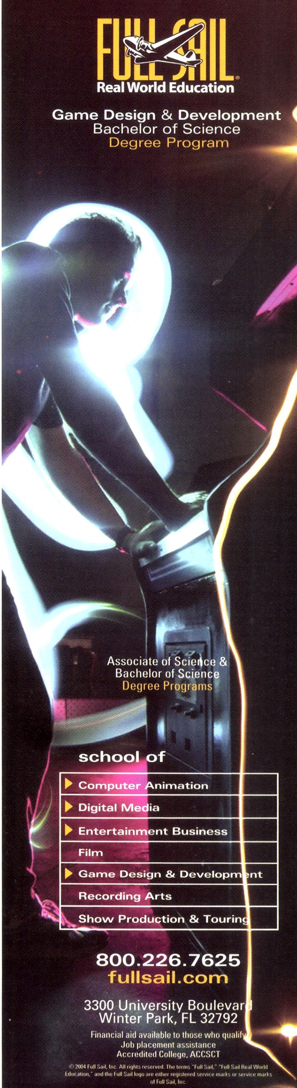
Flash you want you got flash. / Super cars super colors snap and / freeze for pictures that tease / Are you a hardcore gamer / I'll let you know this ain't no shaman / Pick the viper if you're a true gamer / With horsepower to tame her. / Road

OPM CORRECTION BOX



Here at *OPM*, a most grievous of errors has occurred. In our story about Koei and its double-combo of *Dynasty Warriors PSP* and *Kessen III*, we mistakenly ran screenshots of *Samurai Warriors XL*. The person responsible (Scooter) has been placed under the most severe of Chinese Water Torture. Here are screens of both games to make up for this gravest of injustices.

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PlayStation 2
MONSTER HUNTER
Test Drive
POWER RANGERS: DINO
SHADOW HEARTS
SRS STREET RA
CATWOMA
SHREK 2

rage we got that with a viper / that on the road is built to attack.
Bryan Tapia
Los Lunas, NM

A PILE OF CRAPTACULAR

You must be kidding me, right? Under the banner "How Do You Top That" with a subhead suggesting the best year ever for PS2, John is seen peeking through scores of games including such heavyweight classics as *ShellShock, Crash Twinsanity, Power Rangers*, and *Catwoman*! Please tell me he's sorting through the dregs to get to the real gems, or have the sleepless nights finally caught up with him (such dedication!)?
Kyle Wadsworth
via e-mail

Our excessive vanity would never allow us to admit that we're less than fantastically perfect. To that end, rather than let you be correct, we'll just say that John's picture was taken in Bizarro World, where up is down, bad is good, and people say "good-bye!" when they greet you! Hello!

READ HOW HE SENT IT

I don't know what your guys' e-mail address is. I'm pretty sure it's opm@ziffdavis.com, but I am not completely sure. Can you good people at *OPM* please respond to my e-mail address telling me your e-mail? I have a few questions. BTW, I would mail you this, but I don't know your address, either.
BlinxDaTimeSweep
via e-mail

CAST AWAY

Hello. I just wanted to share with you the lengths I've gone to to play videogames. See, I recently broke my wrist playing football. The doctor told me I'd be in a cast for 12 weeks. When I got home I realized *GTA: San Andreas* and *Snake Eater* were coming out in a week. How can I play with a cast on my wrist up to my thumb?! Well, I decided to use my index finger as my thumb. It isn't that hard, and I'm actually quite good using it, too. So if you're faced with the same dilemma, remember you can always use your index finger. I cannot wait to get this stupid cast off!
Shaun
via e-mail

We salute your ability to make your index finger a new prehensile digit! You might have just unlocked the next step in man's evolution! A winner is you!

KOJIMA KERMIT KRAZINESS

I think there might be something wrong with Hideo Kojima. In *Metal Gear Solid 3*, if you look under some of the different things, you see these little muppets. Shoot them, and they start making noise.
Matt Heilman
Columbus, OH

Actually, if you find and shoot all of those little frog puppets, you unlock a pretty cool item. We haven't gotten around to doing it ourselves, and crafty Kojima won't tell us what it is, but the rumor going around is that you unlock a thermoptic camouflage suit. Prove us right or wrong, readers!

4.5 OUT OF 5! OH NOEZ!

I wanted to know what was wrong about about *Kingdom Hearts* and *Legend of Dragoon*. Personally, I think that they are two of the best games ever. When I was playing them I noticed almost no flaws with both of them. Please tell me why you gave these a 4.5.
Robert Fogt
via e-mail

From the tone of this letter, you think we gave these games 4.5 out of 27 or something. Remember, kids, 4.5 out of 5 is not a bad score! It's an awesome game with few flaws, as you said above! Anyhow, since you want to know why we dared to declare these games "less than perfect," here goes: *Kingdom Hearts* because of its superwonky and annoying camera, and *Legend of Dragoon* because it's relentlessly linear and the writing was cringe-worthy at times. «

ASK US ANYTHING

AND WE'LL ANSWER

SUPERMAN RELATIVITY

Q OK, this is a doozy of a question. All right, Superman can travel around the world in the blink of an eye, or so it would seem to the average human, right? When he's traveling quickly, time is passing by normally for him, though. So, when he's traveling around the world, to him, it's taking days, but in actuality, it's taking less than a second. So does that mean whenever he travels quickly, he ages faster, traveling into the future? Or could it mean that he is doing everything in slow motion most of the time, meaning he speaks and moves in constant slow motion?
Anson Tran
vie e-mail

A The time dilation that you're describing is only really noticeable at a speed of 90 percent of the speed of light. The Earth's circumference is 40,000 kilometers, and light travels at 300,000 kilometers per second, so even if Superman circles the world in a second, he's only traveling about 10 percent of the speed of light, which has barely any time dilation effect. So even if he zips around the world in seconds, he ages faster by just a fraction of a second. The only DC superhero who can experience the time dilation effect you're asking about is the Flash; his use of the speed force (don't ask) can theoretically let him travel faster than light. It's been shown that the Flash can as a result exist in several dimensions/timelines/places simultaneously (which is how Flash was able to stop a crime before it happened).

Your question could have also been easily dismissed by the notion that comic book characters don't follow our Earth's rules of physics.

WOO-ING SAN ANDREAS

Q I saw on the back of the *San Andreas* case CJ is carrying two guns. I have been playing for a while and haven't gotten the chance to carry two guns—is this possible?
Enrique Sanchez
via e-mail

A Yes, you can go guns akimbo. But only with one-handed guns, and you need to have hitman proficiency with them to boot.

1UP.com™

BLOG OF THE MONTH

"I couldn't help but try to think of who my favorite videogame badass is. I have two who could fit quite well, and who I have a strong affinity for: Solid Snake and Dante. I have had much more experience with Snake than I've had with Dante, but I think that they both hold a very high status in the badass category. However, who's #1? It's easy to just to ask who would win in a fight. Who would? They are both very capable of pulling their own stunts and somehow staying alive. Is this the main question for which the answer is that which will solve my dilemma? I think being a badass is more than just "who would win," and it's a very difficult decision for me. Who would I fear most? Dante. Who makes a larger impact on me? Snake. Can anyone voice their thoughts and help me decide?"
Patrick Meyers
bluhairRPGkid.1UP.com

CLUB OF THE MONTH

"PSP Nation is a group of hardcore gamers who share a tight bond, the Sony PSP handheld gaming system. Anyone looking for more info on this incredible system are encouraged to stop by and check us out."
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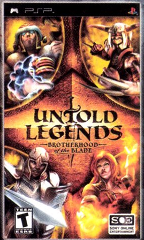

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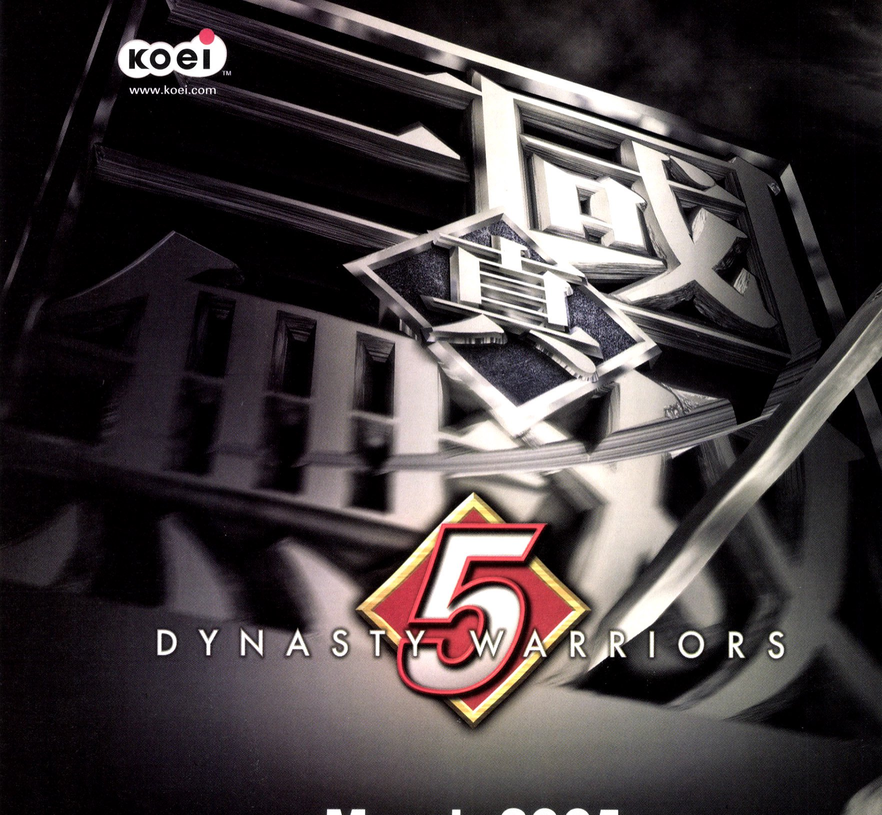
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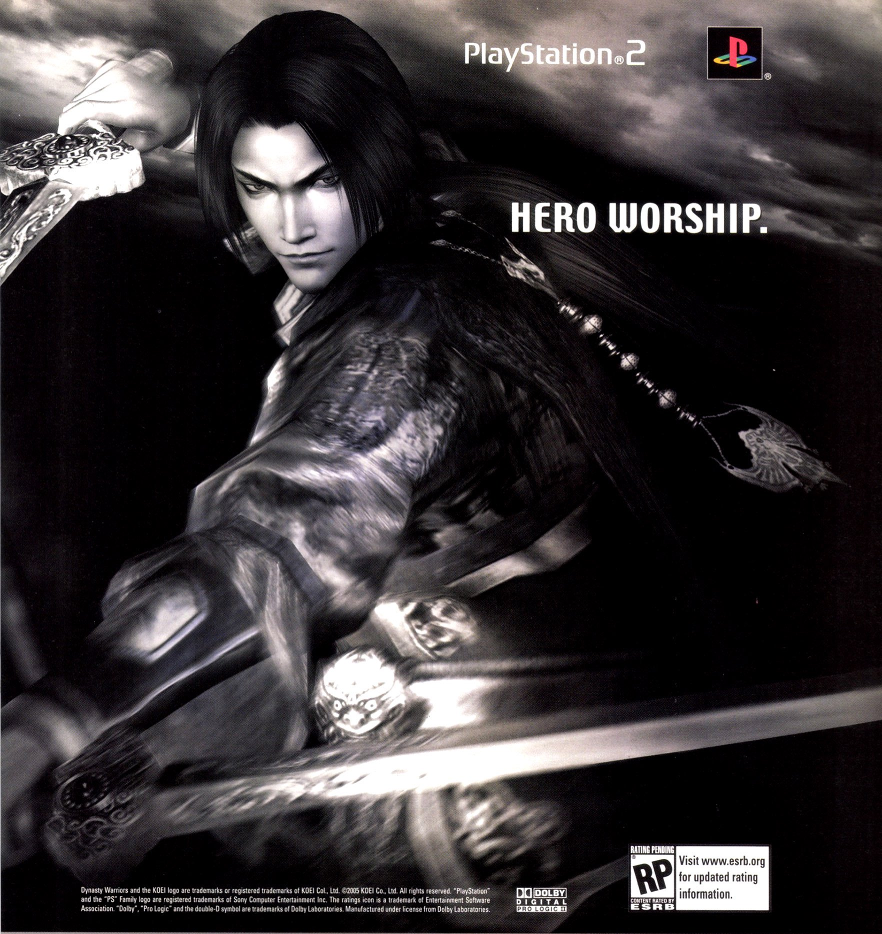
Anticipated for Launch



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DOLBY DIGITAL PRO LOGIC II

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- Collect and exchange hundreds of "Second-in-command" officers using the Memory Stick Duo™, and select the officers you take into battle!
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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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HYPE

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EA & NFL

HOW THEIR NEW DEAL WILL KILL FOOTBALL ON PLAYSTATION

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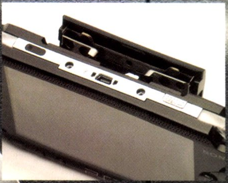
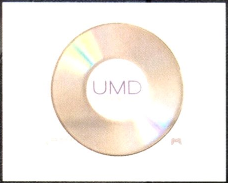




OUT OF THE HANDHELD GAMING GHETTO

SONY GUNS FOR NINTENDO

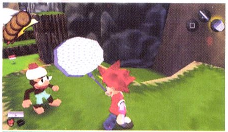
The only surprise at the PSP debut event held by Sony CEA at January's Consumer Electronics Show was the lack of an announcement about the specific release date or pricing information for either the unit or its games. In fact, the only mention made of a release date was a statement from CEO Kaz Hirai that "For North America, we will most likely release the PSP in late March of 2005."

Instead of details about when we'll finally get this gorgeous gadget and how much it will set us back, convergence was the name of the game: Much of the 45-minute presentation focused on the PSP's abilities to store photos, play MP3s, and show video. "It's the first product to legitimately deliver on the convergence mantra," boasted Hirai. "Not only is PSP a digital music player, but there is a huge potential for media consumption through digital UMD video."

Also on hand was a fighting attitude atypical of the usually nonconfrontational entertainment company. In a challenge, Hirai promised that "PSP will elevate portable entertainment out of the handheld gaming ghetto, and Sony is the only company that can do it. We actively accept this challenge, and dare I say...the baton has been passed."

He continued: "PSP is full of innovation far superior to anything on the market today. Just as the PlayStation in 1995 revolutionized gaming and the way our industry does business, PSP will serve as the disrupter in the portable entertainment space."

The good news for gamers is that this fighting attitude may translate into savings. In fact, speculation is that one reason there was no announcement on price is because Sony may be calculating if it can offer PSP for less than the rumored $199 price point. A price tag of $149 would do more than just issue a verbal challenge to Nintendo: Sony would be putting its money where its mouth is.

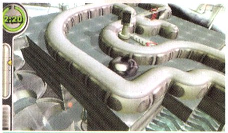


APE ESCAPE

Ape Escape's charm comes not from being packed with monkeys wearing pants and flashing lights on their heads, although that certainly doesn't hurt. No, it derives from it being one of the first games designed to fully take advantage of the DualShock—and the ambidextrous analog-nub fondling that entailed. The PSP's first *Ape Escape*, while offering a certain amount of nub fondling, suffers dramatically due to the control layout of the system. With two sticks, *Ape Escape* is a beautiful example of clever Japanese game design and is packed with curious and witty gameplay ideas. With a sliding PSP nub, it's just another silly character action game full of monkeys wearing pants. Everything you expect is in there in terms of story: time traveling supermonkeys, hats that make you smarter, a brainiac professor apparently obsessed with monkey-catching paraphernalia, and a hero who adheres to pretty much every Japanese character-design cliché.

As for reasons to play it on PSP, it has to be said that the graphics are slick and vibrant, and the simple, family-friendly gameplay makes it one of those good first games to buy for a system because it won't confuse people when you're showing off your new toy. Minigames aplenty keep things bearable, however, and then, of course, it promises multiplayer games using the Wi-Fi connection. At the end of the day, though, it's *Ape Escape*. You've played it before.

Pub. SCEA **Dev.** SCEI



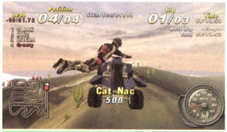
ARCHER MACLEAN'S MERCURY

Archer MacWho? If you're not a big fan of pool (or snooker) games, or if you're not of English descent, or if you didn't own an Atari ST, or if you don't remember a *Defender* clone called *Dropzone* from back in the olden days, chances are the significance of his presence will be completely lost on you. To the rest of us, it's good to see a game-industry veteran still leading the way when it comes to doing something completely different.

The gist of *Mercury* is that you have to guide different-colored blobs of mercury around a 3D maze by tilting the environment. The liquid metal flows around quite convincingly and will split into beads just like the (lethal) real thing if you snag it on a corner or get it caught in a trap. There are over 70 different maps to get through, and they are peppered with 30 different kinds of traps and gadgets that must be traversed, including bridges that you need to move by guiding your blob onto a switch and more elaborate machinery. If you're desperate for a gaming frame of reference in order to get an idea of what this is like, think *Marble Madness*. It's intuitive and simple, and it is the kind of thing that just about anyone can pick up and play.

Although not confirmed at the Sony event, there will be a special edition of the game shipped with a USB tilt device that will enable you to play the game simply by moving the PSP itself, something that will make the gameplay even more intuitive.

Pub. Ignition **Dev.** Awesome Studios



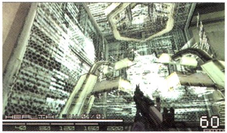
ATV OFFROAD FURY

A little-known fact about Sony's *ATV* franchise is that it's actually the second biggest selling first-party game, behind only *Gran Turismo*. With that knowledge safely tucked away in the back of your brain, the presence of a PSP version of *Offroad Fury* at the PSP's debut event in Vegas should come as no huge surprise.

Like the latest iteration of its big brother on PS2, the portable version was developed by Climax and brings the majority of the features that you expect from the franchise, along with the obligatory wireless multiplayer connectivity for an as yet undetermined number of players. Right now, Climax is simply stating "multiple," but the smart money is on four.

Graphically, it doesn't really provide any surprises. It's almost exactly what you'd expect from a handheld version of *ATV*, although we did notice that the player models lacked some of the flair of the PS2 build's. This is hardly a big deal, but it does lend a bit of a jaggy, early 3D-accelerated PC game look to the thing. It has effects oozing out of every orifice, though—lens flare, dirt particles, you name it. The game's speed was surprising. Whereas many of the other 3D racers on the system (notably *Underground Rivals* and *Wipeout*) were noticeably slower than their console brethren, presumably to make them more handheld friendly, *ATV* felt a bit faster. Not unplayably so, but it certainly whizzes those little Ozzy-crippling dirt quads around at a fair old lick.

Pub. SCEA **Dev.** Climax



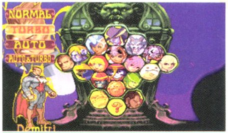
CODED ARMS

You may have caught snippets of video of this one if you've been trawling the Web for PSP goodies in the past month or two. In case you're wondering, this is the one that looks as though it might be like *Killzone*. It's not, but it does boast some similarly impressive visuals and is the first full-on first-person shooter for the system.This kind of gameplay typically doesn't translate well to a handheld platform. Imagine what it's like if you get motion sickness playing an FPS on a TV screen and then amplify this by a factor of 10 when you consider all that wobbling around from holding the thing in your hand. Thankfully, the PSP itself overcomes a lot of this problem thanks to its gigantor screen. A lot of bloggage has been devoted to how wonderful the PSP's screen is, but a game like *Coded Arms* really helps hammer the point home.

Coded Arms has all the boxes checked on the list of things you'd expect from a PSP FPS. It has multiplayer support (for just four players, which is a little disappointing), a ton of different weapons to fool around with, awesome graphics, a suitably silly story line, and something about an alien invasion.

The environments all look gorgeous, and the widescreen format really helps the genre. The design of the crablike alien bugs leaves a little to be desired, but overall, this is as good a first-generation FPS as we've ever seen on a new platform. Let's hope the story and gameplay development live up to the presentation.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Konami



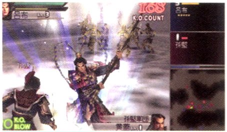
DARKSTALKERS CHRONICLE:
THE CHAOS TOWER

What is it these days with everyone giving games ludicrously long titles? Why does the reasonably inconsequential *Darkstalkers* franchise warrant not one, but two subtitles? Capcom insists that the "fighting phenomenon" has been updated and redesigned exclusively for PSP, which is stretching the truth a little for sure. Updated yes, as it now packs characters from *Darkstalkers, Night Warriors: Darkstalkers Revenge*, and *Darkstalkers 3*. That's 18 characters, for those of you hardcore enough into your 2D fighters to still be paying attention.

Gameplay hasn't been tweaked too much, as there's not a great deal new being done with the genre lately. New modes include a limit battle, which randomly inflicts some kind of handicap on each player, and tower mode, which has you picking three characters and battling through in a sort of glorified *Mortal Kombat*–like survival mode. Unlockable goodies cater very much to the hardcore (as this is definitely a specialist genre these days, no matter how open-minded you are), and a Wi-Fi connection for two players provides the necessary PSP-ness to the proceedings.

A small number of truly dedicated 2D fans are no doubt soiling themselves with glee at the prospect of taking this thing with them wherever they go, but the rest of you are no doubt completely unable to express your indifference on the subject. It's a launch game, by the way.

Pub. Capcom **Dev.** Capcom



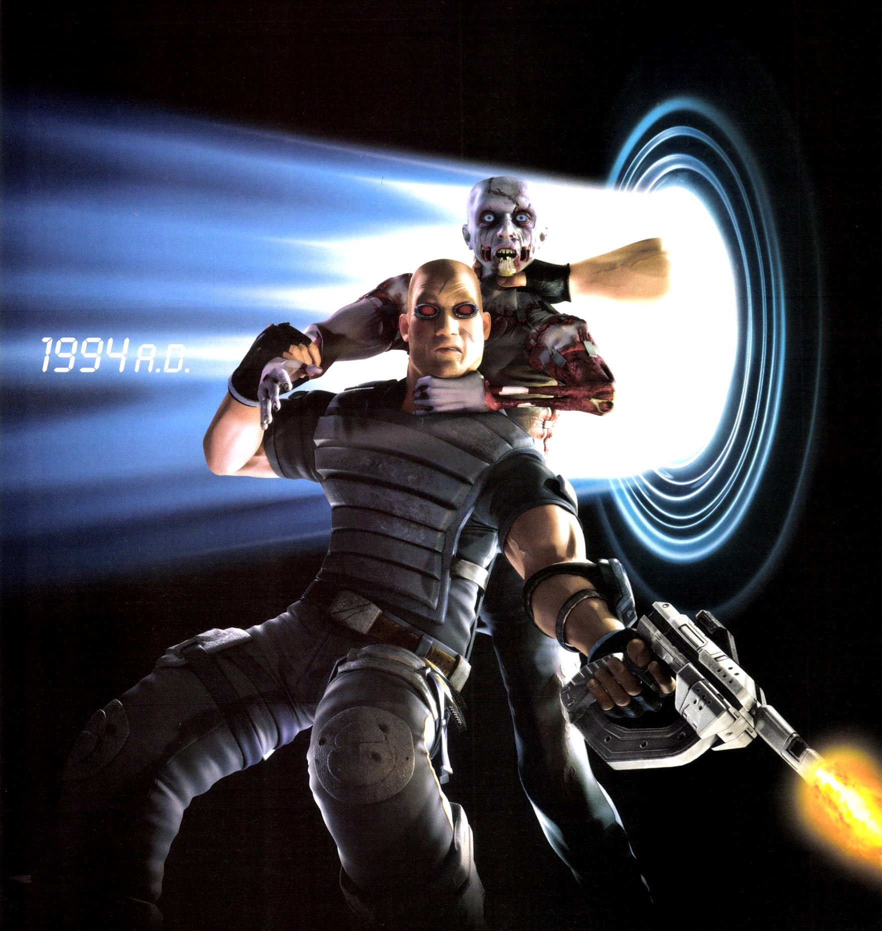
DYNASTY WARRIORS

Developed by Koei's Omega Force team and presided over by Akihiro Suzuki (main programmer for *Dynasty Warriors 1, 2,* and *3* and producer of *Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires*), this game doesn't stray far from the formula the publisher has established over three successful PS2 titles. It's set during the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history, and you (as one of 42 more or less real-life generals) must guide an army, take control of a series of battles, and score a victory for your faction.

Due to the impracticalities of re-creating the PS2 version's enormous battle maps on a portable system, the PSP *Dynasty* uses a "battlefield area system," which divides up the field into discrete chunks that are connected together by a map that'll remind series fans of *DW4*. Each of these individual skirmish areas may contain enemy squadrons or generals, and most of them have some sort of strategic importance to the battle—they may contain a stronghold, for example, or a food source.

Hands-on time with the game reveals something that is very, very similar to the PS2 franchise. The only problem we noticed was some fairly heinous slowdown when there were a lot of soldiers onscreen at once, and then, of course, there's the ubiquitous issue with the damn PSP nub. It works, it's fine, but it's uncomfortable simply because of how you have to hold the system. Given the frenetic nature of the gameplay, you're going to be wishing for something different.

Pub. Koei **Dev.** Koei



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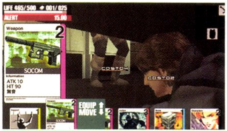
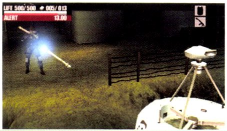
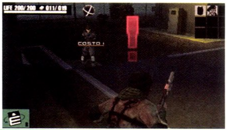






METAL GEAR ACID

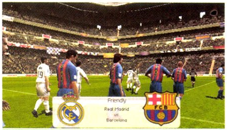
How exactly do you play *Metal Gear* as a card game? Well, try to erase all thoughts of a traditional *MGS* title, and we'll give you a quick explanation.

Cards are fundamental to everything in *Acid*. Every time Snake does something, it takes one or more cards to perform that action. Snake's starting deck is limited to 30 cards, with a maximum of three of any one card within the deck. There are over 200 different cards and five different classes in play: weapon cards, which dish out damage; action cards, which let you equip stuff like body armor; rations cards, which are pretty self-explanatory; character cards, which embody the personalities of characters from the franchise for a given effect (Sniper Wolf's card, for example, increases the hit percentage of a weapon when played); and finally, support cards, which do things like decrease the time between moves. Every turn (yes, it's turn based) you can choose to either sacrifice a card in order to move or draw two cards to be played. Every card in the deck has a "cost" associated with it, and this cost is translated into the time you must wait between turns. The better the ability of the card, the more costly it is, so keeping a spread of cards in your deck is essential if you're to move relatively freely through the game. Keeping everything organized is actually pretty simple, and there's a fairly intuitive deck editor.

The game is mission based, and these missions are loosely held together with a preposterous story that will have hardcore *Solid* fans wondering if Kojima has finally lost his marbles. Set in 2016, the story focuses on a terrorist group called Pythagoras that has hijacked a plane in order to steal a biological weapon and has taken its creator prisoner. Snake's fairly predictable job is to rescue Fleming, the creator, and steal back the weapon, but then, um, things get a bit silly. The terrorists communicate using talking puppets, it seems, and Snake's codec support comes from a psychic with a doll fetish and a seriously busty Japanese-American girl.

Acid is clearly an aside to the real business of hardcore *Metal Gear Solid*–ness and is presumably not meant to be taken seriously. Graphically, it's gorgeous. It's not primo PSP material, but it's solidly in the middle ground between *MGS* on PS1 and *MGS2* on PS2.

Pub. Konami Dev. Konami



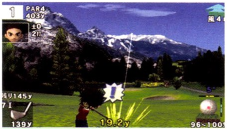
FIFA SOCCER

As EA is quick to point out, *FIFA Soccer* for PSP has one big advantage over its console-based big brother: The system's 16:9 screen allows you to see a good 10 to 20 more yards of the field than the 4:3 television you probably own permits, which can make a big difference when trying to find the open man. Somewhat surprisingly, *FIFA* for PSP boasts impressive features that are comparable to what you'd find in the console versions of the game. For instance, have you EVER played a handheld sports game with 350 teams? They're all there and ready for season or tournament play, whichever you feel most comfortable with.

Another cool touch you won't find even in the console versions (granted because they ship when the season begins) is a midseason scenario mode. Here, you can take over your favorite team from a point in the middle of the actual 2004-2005 season and determine what happens from then on yourself.

EA Sports' response to the challenge of handling save games on a handheld is particularly elegant and something we hope everyone and their mothers rip off in the months ahead. Games can be paused and saved at any point (thank goodness), but when you reload your save, *FIFA* plays back the last five seconds of your presave gameplay and then hands the action over to you. It's like a rolling start—imagine how awesome it would be if every PSP game did this.

Pub. EA Sports Dev. EA Team Fusion



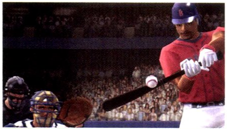
HOT SHOTS GOLF

Lots has been written about *Hot Shots* since the PSP's launch in Japan, but there are a few points that bear reiterating just to hammer home something about the system itself. While the game manages to very effectively bring the *Hot Shots* experience to the PSP, it does so with a vibrancy and solidity that makes you think it's tapping into the very essence of the platform. The graphics are so bold and gorgeous that they seem to extend beyond the confines of the huge PSP screen, and you find yourself hopelessly lost in its simplicity. Some people say it looks simple, but in truth it's a really beautiful game.

Now, it's probably not as good a golf game as EA Sports' *Tiger Woods* on PSP. It doesn't boast as many features, and its controls are quite primitive in the grand scheme of things, but to quote everyone who has played it, "It's *Hot Shots Golf* on PSP, what more could you possibly want?" It has quirky characters (with plenty of surprises to unlock); courses with broad fairways, forgiving roughs, and huge greens; and gameplay that relies on the wind to make things hard. Sound familiar?

Multiplayer support is for up to eight players wirelessly, but sadly, there doesn't appear to be any multiplayer gameplay for people sharing a single PSP, which does strike us as a little odd. Given how well *Tiger Woods* pulls off this feature, let's hope Clap Hanz incorporates something similar in next year's inevitable sequel.

Pub. SCEA Dev. Clap Hanz



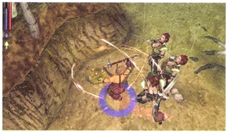
MVP BASEBALL

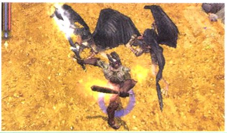
The first baseball game for PSP is certainly pretty impressive looking. Graphically, it doesn't look all that far off from its bigger brother on PS2, and featureswise, it doesn't seem to have been stripped of too much. Just about everything from *MVP 2004* seems to be present, including the popular pure swing system. Like with other EA Sports launch games, there's a huge emphasis on multiplayer gameplay, with both wireless and pass-the-PSP party play modes for up to four players.

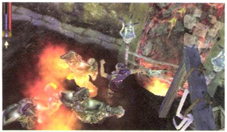
As we mentioned in our exclusive first look last month, you can play through an entire season, all the way to the World Series, or go for exhibition games, a home-run shootout, or a pitcher showdown. All modes are open as single or multiplayer challenges, and the controls feel very much like *MVP*'s on PS2. Although the PSP nub is a bone of contention with most games (as you can probably tell from the attention it has been getting in these early previews), it actually lends itself remarkably well to sports games like *MVP* and *Tiger Woods*, thanks to the ease with which it snaps back and returns to center without wobbling around all over the place. Getting a good hit is actually remarkably satisfying.

Although not apparent in the version we played at the event in Vegas, *MVP* will be just as goodie packed as its other EA siblings, with extensive EA Pocket Trax music and videos available as extras that you can access from the Main menu.

Pub. EA Sports Dev. EA Team Fusion







UNTOLD LEGENDS: BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE

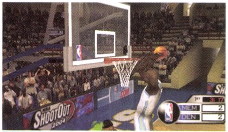
The only hack-n-slash RPG on tap for PSP's launch is Sony Online Entertainment's new property *Untold Legends: Brotherhood of the Blade*. While the new game does not take place in the *EverQuest* universe, the look and feel of the game are so similar to *Norrath* that even the SOE PR reps refer to it in casual conversation as "*Champions* on PSP." But no: This is the all-new (albeit incredibly similar) game world of Aven, one that SOE promises we'll see in future games from the company, both for the portable and primary consoles.

So how does monster-bashing translate to the small screen? Surprisingly well, actually. The game looks damn good (particularly the spell effects, some of which fill the whole screen) and runs quite smoothly. And the screen width makes it easy to spy approaching enemies before they're right on top of you; it's rather like you're playing a PS2 counterpart with the camera zoomed in as far as possible. The analog nub also works fluidly—in fact, it's one of the best examples we've seen from the games we've gotten hands-on time with so far. Certain editors at *OPM*, however, may have to tape their right thumbs down as they keep looking for the right analog stick to swing the camera around as they switch directions onscreen.

For hardcore RPG-ers who need the numbers: Choose one of four classes (knight, druid, berserker, or alchemist), play through 100 separate levels, battle 150 different monster types plus three main bosses, complete the main campaign plus 20 side quests, take 30 to 35 hours to do all this....You get the picture.

In a nod to the new platform's portability, a few changes have been made from its PS2 counterparts. In *Untold Legends*, you'll be able to save anywhere instead of having to track down a specific save point (although be careful—if you save while an enemy is in midswing, that's exactly where you'll be brought back, which can prove a little troublesome if you're low on health). And the story line will be advanced entirely through in-game conversations—no lengthy cut-scenes to suck away your precious battery life.

Pub. SOE Dev. SOE



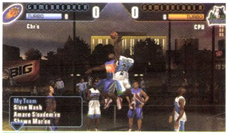
NBA 2005

989 Sports returns (stop snickering in the back), and the PSP could be the place where the group gets some credibility back. Touted as the "first real basketball simulation created for handheld entertainment systems," *NBA 2005* is certainly quite different from EA Sports' more arcade-style titles. Graphically, like just about everything on the system, it looks quite tasty, and truth be told, also a little unusual. You have to take our word for it, I guess. The screenshots really don't do it justice. It's smooth, gorgeously animated, and yet has a somewhat stylized look that some have said looks almost "claylike." It's not the best description, but it's oddly apt.

We weren't able to spend enough time with the title to really get an accurate impression of how good its A.I. is (usually 989's Achilles' heel, along with graphics, controls, logic, and reason for being), but we did get to fool around with the "clutch shooting mechanism," which is an icon-based way of shooting more accurate shots by watching colors that indicate potential accuracy.

To affirm its PSP-ness, *NBA* has wireless play (although just for two) and a bunch of minigames to keep you occupied on a short bus trip. Paint mode is the minigame 989 wants to draw everyone's attention to—it's an unusual game in which you have to paint the whole court with your colors. For our money, we think the three-point shootout will be the most popular minigame.

Pub. SCEA **Dev.** 989 Sports

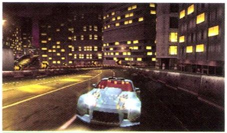


NBA STREET: SHOWDOWN

How's this for an endorsement? Boss man Davison, who knows about as much about basketball as he does about particle physics (namely, he's aware of its existence), claims that *NBA Street* on PSP is so damn good, it's on his preorder list already. He has no interest whatsoever in any of the three PS2 versions and was happy to let Todd and Giancarlo waste hours upon hours with the game in the name of "research," but now he's hooked. Why? Because of the minigames we got to play. Sure, *Street* has wireless head-to-head modes, and it has an extremely thorough king of the court (career) mode, but the party modes are what got him drooling. Shot blocker was the first to tickle his oh-so-British fancy, especially when played in the pass-the-PSP party mode against Giancarlo. GC owned his ass, but the tables were turned in the arcade shootout, which is pretty much a videogame version of that arcade machine where you lob balls into mechanical moving baskets. Sure, it sounds simple and boring, but once you've tried it, it's like the most addictive gaming drug known to man. We know, we had to pry the thing out of his hands so we could all go home.

In truth, this is the key to all the *best* PSP experiences. The key to success seems to be the mantra "simple is effective," and *NBA Street* does a truly remarkable job of evoking the kind of basketball experience that we used to enjoy years ago in the arcades.

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Team Fusion



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND RIVALS

Along with Studio Liverpool's amazing reinterpretation of *Wipeout*, *Rivals* is one of our favorite games on the PSP so far. Packed with features that make its presence on PSP eminently justifiable, *Rivals* ditches the fluff (like story and Brooke Burke), leverages all of the things we love the most about *Underground*, tunes them up, and tricks them out to create a wonderfully playable game.

The fact that the guys at EA's Team Fusion have been able to bring the look and feel of the *Underground* games to PSP is no mean feat, and the first time you see the thing running, we guarantee you'll be just as amazed as the first time you saw *NFSU*. The sense of speed, the gorgeous graphical effects, and the spot-on controls have all been brought across to the handheld version, and the gameplay has been optimized for a handheld format. Graphics have been tweaked, so it's easier to see bends and obstacles, and the camera wobble has been perfected so that you still get a sense of speed but without the additional real-life PSP wobble making you want to blow chunks.

Wireless head-to-head play is for just two players (slightly disappointing, given that *Ridge Racer* and *Wipeout* support eight, but hey...there'll inevitably be a *Rivals 2*), but some of the real fun comes from the party modes, which allow you to pass the PSP back and forth in order to "own" your opponent.

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** EA Team Fusion

BET YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS COMING!

Not to be left off the shiny, new PSP bandwagon, Rockstar has announced that it will be releasing two games for the handheld in the upcoming year. To no one's surprise, one of the games will be a new entry in the popular *Grand Theft Auto* series. This new game will be set in Liberty City, although there's been no word on whether we'll be following the nameless protagonist again or a new cast of characters this time.

Also in the works is a port of the upcoming *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition*. Rockstar says both games should be available shortly after the PSP's launch.

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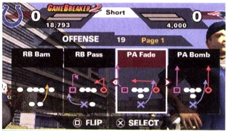
0:42:2
LAST 1:25:12
BEST 1:13:44

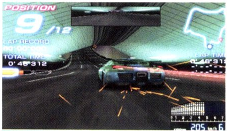


NFL STREET 2: UNLEASHED

We're going to be honest here. Of all the games we saw at Sony's event, this is possibly the one we like the least. It might just be because we're presentation whores and it seemed to be suffering quite dramatically in that department, or it might be that of all the games we've seen that are modified versions of PS2 games, this is the one that's suffered the most in the transition, based on the early version on show. Considering that its *Street* brother is so good, it's especially jarring. How can two games from the same studio, with the same underlying concept (take sport, hip-hopificate it) be so different in execution? We don't know, and we're hoping that it has a lot to do with the fact that the team at EA has had very little time with a real live PSP dev kit and has yet to PSP-ify the PS2 gameplay. We're fairly convinced that's it, because as concepts go, this should be a perfect fit on the PSP. It's simpler and more focused on gameplay than something like *Madden*, which itself is oddly conspicuous in its absence from EA Sports' PSP launch lineup.

As with all the other EA games covered here, *NFL Street 2* boasts a host of multiplayer modes, both wireless and in party mode, plus a boatload of minigames that people will probably play a lot more of than the main career mode. It also features EA's Pocket Trax music player and will let you listen to all of the (mostly hip-hop) music, along with a number of music videos from featured artists.

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Team Fusion



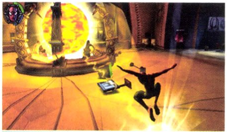
RIDGE RACER

Anyone who imported a PSP from Japan already knows everything there is to know about this title, but for the millions of you who didn't do that, here's a quick rundown of everything that's extremely cool about Namco's first PSP game. First, it's a pleasant throwback to the original PlayStation—*Ridge Racer* was a launch title for the system. Let's hope that's a good omen. Second, think of this as a "best of" game that steals all the good bits from a 10-year-old franchise.

OK, so what's it got? Well, eight-player head-to-head races for a start, which is a first for the franchise and a good reason to preorder this baby if you're even the slightest fan of a previous game in the series. The largest selection of tracks in any version makes this even more worthwhile; there are 24, to be exact, with all the best ones taken from both arcade (like *Rave Racer*) and console versions of every game from the past decade. Add a selection of 58 different cars to this and you have the biggest, most comprehensive *Ridge Racer* ever. As an added bonus, this is also the first game in the franchise to include upgrades, including nitrous for an extra burst of speed.

How does it play? Exactly the way you hope a new *Ridge Racer* would. The drift-happy mechanics of the previous titles have been refined so that the game feels just right with the PSP's nub, and the sense of speed is exhilarating without being too ridiculously fast as to make it unplayable on a handheld.

Pub. Namco **Dev.** Namco



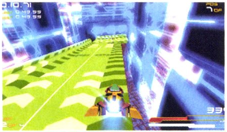
SPIDER-MAN 2

The default control setup for Vicarious Vision's port of *Spidey 2* at Sony's event took a little getting used to. While the nub moved the hero around, the D-pad tweaked the camera. The nub was calibrated sufficiently enough so that it didn't feel as bad as it does in some games, but the awkwardness of where the controls fall on the PSP means that you can't really move and look at the same time, unless you're blessed with two thumbs on one hand.

Three levels were shown at the event: a run through a museum, which ably demonstrated how good the PSP is at replicating PS2-quality lighting effects; a boss fight against Rhino, which was probably the weakest part of the demo because boss fights against Rhino in *Spidey* games usually suck; and a rescue mission set in a nuclear reactor, which was a good demo of some of Spidey's animations. All the levels we saw were indoors, so we didn't get to check out any outdoor webslinging shenanigans, although Activision did supply video for Sony's presentation that looked pretty darn convincing.

At the end of the day, this is a version of *Spider-Man 2*, and you can read whatever you like into that based on your own personal opinions of the PS2 game. Overall, we're told the game will take about seven or eight hours to beat. It has pretty much all the webslinging bases covered, including a few extra moves, and is fairly unique in the PSP launch lineup in that it doesn't have any wireless features.

Pub. Activision **Dev.** Vicarious Visions



WIPEOUT PURE

Pure is quite possibly the most impressive of all the games unveiled for the PSP so far. Yes, it's a racing game, and where would we be at a system launch without all the racing games? But like EA's *Rivals*, this is a game that really showcases what the little guy can do. It's also a satisfying nod to the legacy of the PlayStation and a reminder that it was Psygnosis' (now the snappily titled Sony Computer Entertainment Europe Studio Liverpool) original *Wipeout* that helped put the system on the map.

If you've played any of the first three games, you're going to feel comfortably at home with *Pure*. If your first introduction to the franchise was the fairly awful PS2 version that Bam unwittingly brought to market in the United States, try to wipe that from your memory and go into this with an open mind. For the uninitiated, the game focuses on futuristic racing in which teams hurtle around complex tracks in appropriately wedge-shaped hoverships. There are 16 tracks to race around, each of them evoking the same slick and modern design that the original game did nearly 10 years ago.

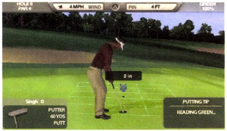
Unique to the PSP version is eight-player gameplay over Wi-Fi along with downloadable content that will allow you to customize your game with new licensed music, skins for the game interface, tracks, and ships. Although we weren't able to test any of these features (nor was it clear exactly how the Internet connection that you'll need to take advantage of these features will be managed), we did get some extensive hands-on time with one of the tracks. In order to make it more playable in handheld form, the action isn't quite as fast paced as it is in previous versions, but it's plenty speedy and is packed with gorgeous graphical effects such as particle-based explosions and, of course, lens flares. The oft-maligned PSP analog nub worked remarkably well with the game, although you may choose to use the D-pad (which is perfectly adequate) purely for comfort's sake.

Likely to be high on many early adopters' preorder lists, *Pure* is a noble dip into the PlayStation's past and will hopefully prove to be a good omen for the handheld.

Pub. SCEA **Dev.** SCEE Studio Liverpool

BANGING TUNES

Sony has yet to release the soundtrack list for *Pure* but is promising an impressive list of licensed artists in the same vein as the original game. The first *Wipeout* was one of the first games to feature licensed music and introduced many people to the likes of Fluke and The Chemical Brothers.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR

The analog nub works so well for *Tiger Woods* that you'd think the system had been created for it. Snapping it back and forth to play a graceful, perfectly placed shot is a deeply satisfying experience, and it helps establish this as one of our favorite PSP launch games—certainly one of the best sports games at launch, alongside stablemate *NBA Street*.

Just about everything that makes the PS2 version of the franchise special is in the PSP version, including a slightly dumbed-down version of the create-a-player feature.

As with the big version, the game boasts a bunch of famous players—Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Vijay Singh—as well as 12 beautifully modeled courses, including Pebble Beach and the Sherwood Country Club.

Wireless head-to-head play comes in five different flavors—notably, one that you haven't seen in *Tiger* before, bingo, bango, bongo. Fans of the sport may well be familiar with the concept, but if you're not one of them, here's how it works. Three types of achievements are rewarded with a point. The first player to get his ball on the green gets a point (bingo). The player whose ball is closest to the pin once all balls are on the green gets a point (bango). And the player who is first to hole out gets a point (bongo). Add up the points at the end of the game and the player with the most points wins. As a multiplayer game, either wireless or in party mode, it's about as good as you could hope for.

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Team Fusion

TWISTED METAL: HEAD-ON

Die-hard fans of the *Twisted Metal* franchise will be pleased to see 14 popular characters return in new variations of classic vehicles, and at Sony's event, we saw a number of these as we tried out one of the 12 different arenas.

In truth, the whole car-combat thing has kind of run its course. Despite being remarkably popular in the early days of the PS1, the attraction seems to have waned with each successive addition, and our time with *Head-On*, while nostalgic, proved that we've all moved on as gamers. Graphically, *Head-On* is perfectly adequate and managed to evoke some familiar feelings, but it was far from being the star of the show that Sony perhaps thought it might be. Before the event in Vegas, the game's existence had hardly been acknowledged, and it wasn't singled out in Kaz Hirai's preamble the way that *Black* was when it was announced for the PS2 a few years ago. Four or five years ago, a new game in this franchise could provoke enthusiastic braying and whooping from the collected throng of the game press. In Vegas, when asked, "Have you seen *Twisted Metal*?" the response was invariably, "Yeah [pregnant pause], did you see *Wipeout*, though?"

Multiplayer modes support up to eight players, and this should certainly prove popular with die-hard old schoolers looking to rekindle the joys of those splitscreen games of yore, only now with a shiny, new black handheld.

Pub. SCEA **Dev.** Incog

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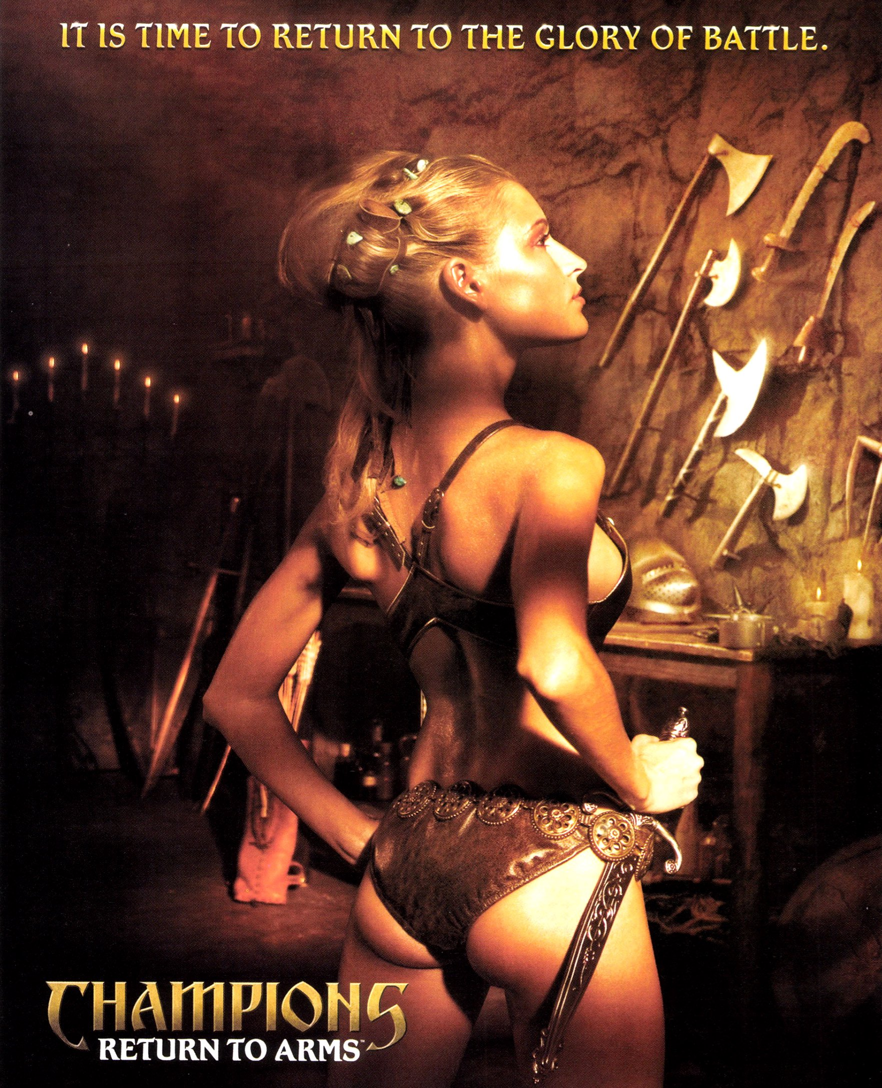
THUG 2 REMIX

Although it was shown only on video at Sony's event, it comes as no surprise that there will be a *Tony Hawk* game on PSP at launch. There is, after all, some kind of *Tony Hawk* game on just about every interactive platform known to man, including a bunch that you've probably never heard of. What was surprising was that this *isn't* just a straight port of the most recent iteration. All of the key features will be present, from the World Destruction Tour and classic gameplay (so you can play it just like it's *Pro Skater 2*, for those of you who haven't evolved with the franchise) to the enormous amount of customization that lets you import photos for player models and create custom skate parks, decks, tricks, and tags. On top of this, PSP gamers get four brand-new environments—Las Vegas, Atlanta, Kyoto, and Santa Cruz—and each of these will have new secret unlockable characters (Elvis in Vegas, perhaps? It would be rude *not to*).

No specifics on the wireless multiplayer features have been announced as *OPM* goes to press, save for the fact that *Remix* will have 10 different game types that will support up to four players each.

The game is currently listed as a spring release, as is just about everything else right now, but given the lack of playable code in Vegas, we're thinking that *THUG 2 Remix* may be a little later to the party than some of the other games featured here. If the system is out in March, expect to see this before May.

Pub. Activision **Dev.** Shaba Games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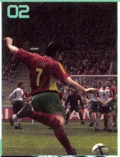
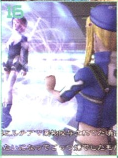
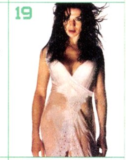
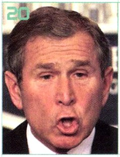
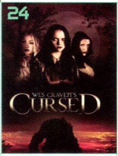
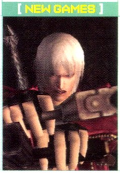
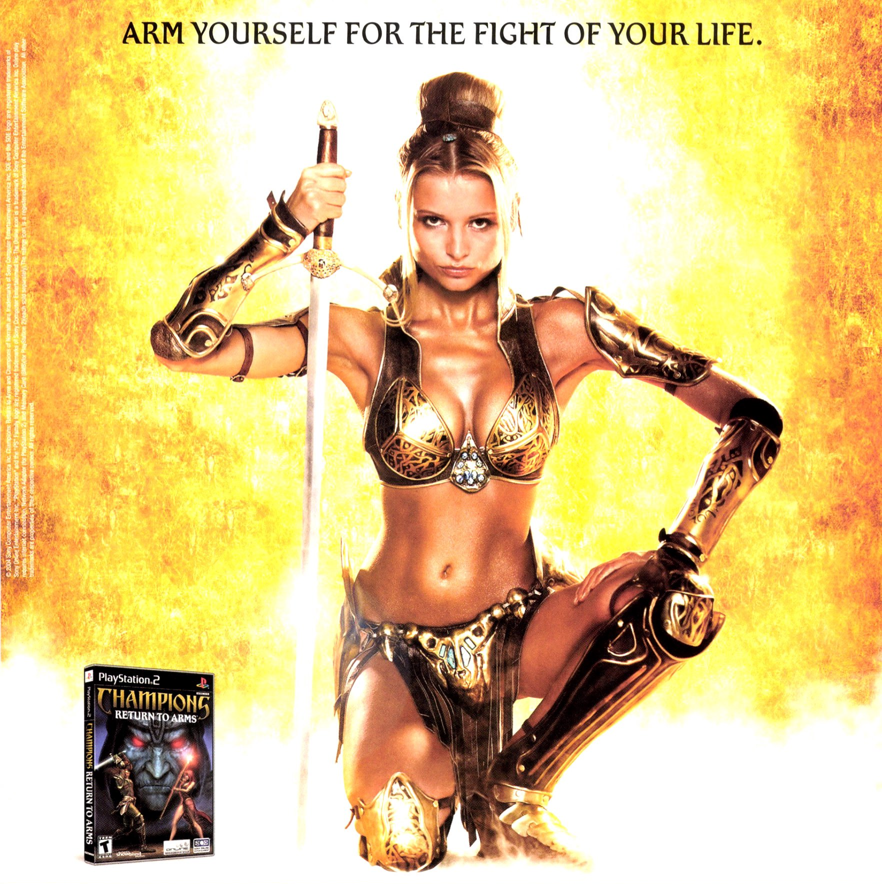
THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION 2

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	Going to be in Vegas tomorrow? Then stop by and check out the eighth annual **Interactive Achievement Awards** going on at the DICE Summit.	01 For those hitting their local gaming boutique, new selections include ***Music Maker*, *Sega Hits***, and ***Winning Eleven 8 International***. Game on. [NEW GAMES]	02 	03	04 Lucy Lawless traded in her warrior princess outfit for that of a movie star—check her out in the new horror flick ***Boogeyman***, opening today.	05
06 Wake up early enough to simulate the **Super Bowl** with *Madden* on your PS2, then run out and place a bet on whomever lost.	07 	08 Among new games available for purchase today: ***Champions: Return to Arms*, *Death by Degrees*, *Shadow of Rome***, and ***NBA Street V3***. [NEW GAMES]			11	12 Denizens of England can check out **Retrovision 5**, a celebration of retro videogames that's taking place this weekend in Somerset.
13 	14 Helpful tip: Spending the day plopped down in front of the television playing games is probably not how your girlfriend wants to spend Valentine's Day, unless you are incredibly lucky.	15 More games! Now you can buy ***Constantine*, *King of Fighters 02/03*, *Nanobreaker*, *Sega Classics Collection*, *Tenchu: Fatal Shadows***, and ***Xenosaga II***. [NEW GAMES]	16 	17	18 ***Constantine*** opens today. It will probably be horrible, but it does feature **Rachel Weisz**, who we think is teh hawt.	19 
20 	21 What do you get the most powerful man in the free world? How about his very own holiday? Happy Presidents' Day!	22 Race, shoot, fight: ***MX vs. ATV Unleashed*, *Project: Snowblind*, *Tekken 5*, *Phantom Crash 2050*, *Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim***, and ***Kessen III*** are out. [NEW GAMES]	23	24  	25 What? Rachel Weisz isn't your cup of tea? Then how about **Christina Ricci**, **Shannon Elizabeth**, or **Portia de Rossi**? You're in luck: They all appear in the new film ***Cursed***.	26
27	28 Didn't like any of the games that came out this month? Maybe tomorrow will be kinder to you: ***MLB 2006*, *MVP Baseball 2005*, *25 to Life*, *Devil May Cry 3***, and ***Cold Fear*** all hit stores.					



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DATA STREAM

THE NEWS IN BRIEF

HELP FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS

The tsunami that struck parts of India and Southeast Asia December 26 caused an outpouring of support from around the world. Now, various videogame companies are helping in the relief effort to restore much of the land that was destroyed and rebuild the affected areas. Electronic Arts is donating $250,000 to the UNICEF South Asian Tsunami Relief fund and doubling any donations made by its employees to either UNICEF or the American International Response Fund. Ubisoft is also donating money to the UNICEF relief fund.

MORE BLU-RAY SUPPORT

Vivendi Universal and Electronic Arts have both announced their support for the Blu-ray high-definition DVD format, which will be used in PlayStation 3. These are the first gaming companies to announce support for any of the next-generation formats. While it seems obvious that the two would join the Blu-ray bandwagon, it does leave questions as to the fate of the HD-DVD that is expected to power Microsoft's next-generation hardware as well as a variety of PCs.

TITUS NO MORE

More and more game publishers are closing their doors. The latest is Titus, which you may or may not remember as the publisher of such incredibly bad games as *RoboCop, Barbarians,* and a variety of *Top Gun* games that had absolutely nothing to do with Maverick and Goose. There is some good news coming out of this; maybe a different company can finally pick up that license and create a game that will truly take us right into the danger zone.

TAKE-TWO BULKS UP

Indie Built, the development house behind *Amped* and *Links 2004* for Xbox, is now under the Take-Two label, which isn't exactly surprising, considering Microsoft's recent moves to cut down on its sports franchises. This acquisition strengthens rumors that Take-Two is looking to expand its library by producing sports games in an effort to take on Electronic Arts' popular line of sports products. Whether or not this will lead to the full-blown acquisition of Visual Concepts remains to be seen.

ZOE FLOWER

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

ZOE FLOWER aka "Gamer Girl," creates TV programs and music videos, and looks good doing it. See the details at zoeflower.1UP.com.

OK, maybe I ate more than my share of chocolate Santa Clauses this Christmas or overdid it on the Baileys, but I have to admit that after a post-Christmas shopping spree that made me the proud owner of the new streamlined PS2, I began to suffer from some serious insecurities.

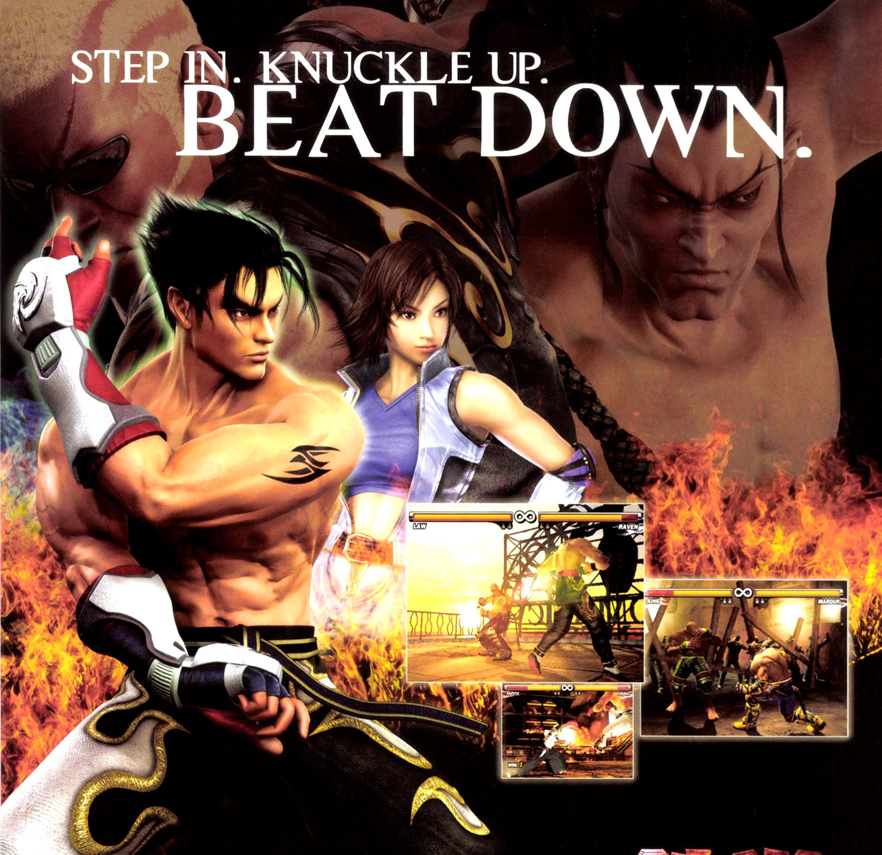
A little backstory first: After a swift farewell ceremony for my original quasi-extinct PS2 (read: kicking it to the curb faster than you can say "disc read error"), I began the childlike wonder of disrobing my new machine from its blankets of packing foam. I will not go on a tangent about how much I despise overpackaging or the guilt I felt about my insatiable desire to continually have the latest technology even if the older technology is not yet obsolete. Granted, I did feel justified in this purchase, considering that in a most pivotal moment in *MGS3*, as I prepared myself to fight The End, my old (not so) faithful PS2 decided to throw a star tantrum and walk off the set—this after I had to dismantle the machine and tweak the laser setting for about an hour just to get the game to boot. Fellow gamers will understand what kind of trauma this can cause.

And thus it was over the Christmas holidays, with my fingers twitching in anticipation and a memory card clutched in my hand, that I jammed my slinky new PS2 into the waiting power socket. Without so much as a disc-spinning grumble, the machine was up and running my game. I was in love! I made a mental note to be sure to hug my little purchase right after my game was done. What a beautiful, sleek, and sexy little thing it is!

MY BIG-BONED XBOX IS SCREAMING, "LOOKS AREN'T EVERYTHING!"

And that is when my festively plump fingers pointed something out…here I was embracing the mentality that "thin is in." Sure, my minimalist aesthetic tastes had come into play, but then I started to ponder what kind of message a design like this was sending. Is thinner better? Why? How is it possible that a gaming system can make me feel guilty for not going out for a morning jog? What was wrong with the design of the PS2, with its substantial torso and Network Adaptor–inspired "junk in the trunk"?

Obviously, in the new year, once the sugar cookies passed through my system, I began to let go of my (ridiculous/irrational) concerns—mostly because *Tekken 5* is just around the corner and I can't stand the thought of being PS2-less at the moment. But as I tie on my running shoes today for day three of my New Year's resolution, I'll be trying not to look at the accusing heroin-chic silhouette in my games center (where my big-boned Xbox is screaming, "Looks aren't everything!"). As for that washed-up cougar of a PS2? I salvaged it from the curb just to remind myself that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes. «



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LEGO STAR WARS

THE NEW FACES OF STAR WARS

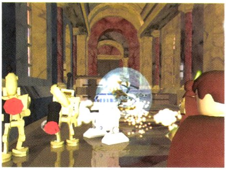
***Star Wars* is undergoing** a serious regression. Not only did we see an 8-year-old Anakin ask Natalie Portman if she is an angel, but we're now going to see *Star Wars* depicted by Legos. Yes, you heard that right.

Lego Star Wars is the newest and most bizarre (yes, even compared to big-headed Darth Maul in *Super Bombad Racing*) iteration of *Star Wars* to date. Yet, it's perhaps this bizarre visual aesthetic that might get people to play a game based on the prequel trilogy.

Rather than just run the "Lego filter" over prequel trilogy content, *Lego Star Wars* is full of honestly interesting gameplay concepts. It sports an interesting replay mechanic: a metric bantha-load of playable characters (48!) and hefty levels full of secrets.

The level structure is pretty flexible as well; it consists of 21 levels divided into three movies with seven chapters apiece. You start in Dex's Diner (from *Episode II*) and enter one of three doors (each signifying a movie from the prequel trilogy); there's also a fourth door that holds all the vehicles you've unlocked so far. Interestingly enough, once you finish a chapter in an episode, you unlock all the other chapters—but in free play mode—so you can immediately have your first character (either Obi-Wan or Qui-Gon) check out the other levels or continue the story mode to unlock more characters and secrets.

Whomever you unlock in story mode can then be used in free play mode—which in turn lets you unlock more neat loot and get even more characters. With such a huge character roster, expect to see usual suspects like Obi-Wan and Anakin—and even playable Darth Maul (Vader, too!) and Jango Fett—along with relative unknowns like, uh, Clone Trooper TK-421 or Droid Trooper 1138.



COLLECTIVE SITH REVENGE

Remember the *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* game? It was, at best, mediocre, and at worst, a game so terrible that LucasArts didn't even do an official *Episode II* game because it didn't want to make two movie duds in a row. As a result, recent *Star Wars* games have made references to the movies, but there have been no direct movie tie-ins until now, with LucasArts' official *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* game.

At least this time it tapped an external developer that doesn't have a horrible game résumé. The Collective, which has done a fair job with *Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is now tasked with the *Episode III* game. Think of the whole game as a tutorial for becoming Darth Vader. That is, you get to play as Anakin Skywalker and start rampaging around with dark-side Force abilities and moves. To balance this out, Collective is also putting you in the robe of Obi-Wan Kenobi—which might mean his gameplay is full of sagely wisdom and Jedi mind-trickery or somesuch.

Not much has been revealed yet. The game comes out before the movie, so it can be used as preemptive spoiler material for dinks that like to ruin movies for other people. Other slim details include the cooperation of *Star Wars* stunt coordinator Nick Gilliard—perhaps Collective's experience in melee combat (from *Buffy*) will help make lightsaber combat more like actual movie-style combat and less like 3D game models spastically jumping around surrounded by lightsaber sound effects. «

Pub. LucasArts **Dev.** The Collective **Release** May 5

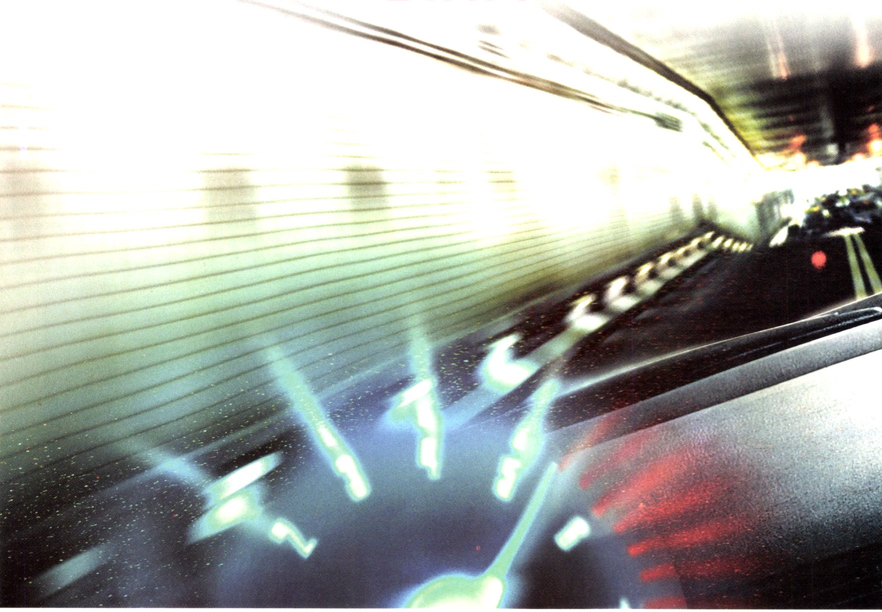
Also, each character has a special ability that is either unique to that character or unique to that character type. The Jedi can use their Force powers to both attack the enemy and manipulate the environment—a neat visual aid is the use of actual Legos to indicate which items are movable and which aren't. Sometimes you'll have to use the Force to break down a Lego obstacle and perhaps reassemble the Legos into a path leading to a hidden area. Queen Amidala, as well as anyone in her royal guard, can use grappling hooks to reach far-off places (perhaps Luke's ability to easily hook a rope within a chasm in the Death Star in *A New Hope* is a genetic trait from his mom). And for some odd reason, Jar Jar can jump really, really high. These are the confirmed abilities at the moment, but don't be surprised to see things like "Jango Fett can fly" or "R2-D2 can unlock any door" or "C-3PO can whine a lot."

Another interesting character detail is that you're never alone. In single player, you have at least one and sometimes up to four A.I.-controlled characters tagging along and helping you solve puzzles (a good chunk of which are cooperative). Not only that, but you can swap characters at any time with a press of the button. Your friend can also join your game and take control of any character he feels like anytime.

If the screens haven't convinced you, trust us—it's a surreal sight to see a mob of Lego Jedi running around brandishing their lightsabers. Just surreal enough to possibly give the franchise a big boost in the small market of *Star Wars* games on the PS2. «

Pub. Giant Interactive Entertainment **Dev.** Traveller's Tales **Release** April

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU DRIVE



IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPEND UNDER THE HOOD. IT'S ALL ABOUT YOUR SKILLS BEHIND THE WHEEL. EXPERIENCE HUNDREDS OF VINTAGE AND MODERN VEHICLES FROM THE WORLD'S TOP MANUFACTURERS AS YOU WORK YOUR WAY UP FROM AMATEUR TO THE TOP PROFESSIONAL DRIVER.

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TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

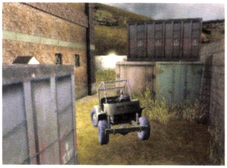
MUCH-LOVED PS2 FRANCHISE GETS THE FULL EA TREATMENT

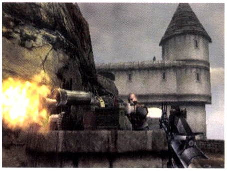
The original *TimeSplitters* is one of those egregiously overlooked games that is actually significantly better than most gamers give it credit for. Other than *SSX*, it was probably the best PS2 launch title back in October 2000. The big selling point at the time, of course, was that the guys on the development team at Free Radical were previously employed by Nintendo powerhouse Rare, which was responsible for one of the greatest first-person shooters of all time, *GoldenEye*. Knowing this makes you wonder why EA didn't just have these guys work on *Rogue Agent* rather than the team at EALA, but that's another story.

Having enjoyed moderate success with the original game, Eidos and Free Radical teamed up again in 2002 for *TimeSplitters 2*, which took the time-traveling theme of the original and spiced it up with a more coherent narrative, more than 100 playable characters, a co-op story mode, and a host of new multiplayer modes that, among many other things, had you committing heinous acts of violence against psychotic monkeys. Although *TS2* was announced around the same time as the PS2 Network Adaptor, one of the most surprising omissions from the game was online play, despite the fact that it offered significant enough network code to support 16 players in the unlikely event that you could get that many people together in a room and linked up using the now-defunct iLink connection. All this didn't stop a lot of you from declaring it one of your favorite first-person shooters of all time, though.

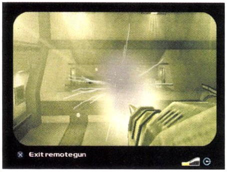
The third game in the franchise takes a number of big steps. Obviously, there's the hop to a new publisher and the resulting might of the EA marketing juggernaut that is now supporting the launch of the game. Also, there have been some major developments in terms of structure. Although increasingly coherent from game to game, the *TimeSplitters* story was always secondary to the fast-paced, silky-smooth action. If you ask any fan of the series what it's actually about, they'd be hard-pressed to tell you anything more than, "It's something to do with these TimeSplitter guys, and they're, er, messing with time or something." Part of the problem is that the experience didn't really have a central hero, and although there was a vaguely existential *Quantum Leap*-ish quality to the proceedings as you hopped from body to body, skipping backward and forward through time, you never really got to identify with anyone in particular.

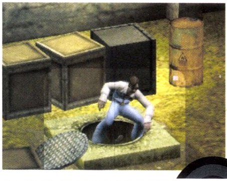
Future Perfect is quite different. This time you play as one guy, Cortez (the bald guy with the big gun on the cover of *TimeSplitters 2*), who is charged with moving through time and tracking down the time crystals that allow the bad guys to manipulate history. Although it subtly acknowledges the previous two games, this is essentially a new stand-





GIANT ROBOT





GRAMMAR LESSON

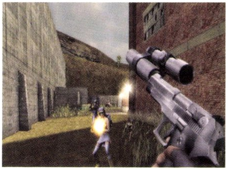
Future perfect is actually "a verb tense that expresses action completed by a specified time in the future and that is formed in English by combining *will have* or *shall have* with a past participle." Yeah, yeah—we know we're not telling you anything you didn't already know.

alone experience that doesn't require any former knowledge of the series, something that may also explain EA's decision not to use a number in the name. The opening sequence, set in the year 2401, explains some of the plight of humanity in its struggle against the eponymous bad guys and immediately casts Cortez as a gruff-talking, gun-toting tough guy as he is sent on his mission through time to trace the origins of the TimeSplitters.

Unlike many shooters, which tend to force you to plod laboriously through a sequential story line, *Future Perfect* treats its narrative in much the same way it does the gameplay. Everything is fast paced and carved up into easily digestible chunks. After it drops you into a new time zone, it immediately starts throwing stuff at you, not wasting any time setting things up or explaining motivations. Do this. Bam. Go here. Bam. Shoot this. Bam. Now go to the next time zone. It's frenetic and exciting, and it manages to keep the pace cooking without ever really letting up. As with *TimeSplitters 2,* you'll encounter a lot of different characters—many of whom you'll team up with to beat certain sections—but this time things are made even more interesting as you bend the laws of physics and team up with yourself. How does this work? In one scene, you're fighting your way through a train packed with bad guys as a helicopter attacks it. Your first objective is to pick off bad guys as they're trying to stop the alternate "you" from shooting down the helicopter with a rocket launcher. Moments later you find yourself as that alternate "you," and you need to take down the chopper while the "you" from a few minutes ago protects you from harm. It's not a particularly original sci-fi story concept (it's no doubt been used several times in *Star Trek* over the years), but it's one of the first times we've seen it used this effectively in a videogame.

EVERYTHING IS CARVED UP INTO EASILY DIGESTIBLE CHUNKS.

Other new gameplay features include vehicles (many of which have gun emplacements that let you and an A.I. or co-op buddy trundle through a level blasting at stuff) and a host of new weapons that span the game's 400-year time line. Although most of the weapons are time-period context sensitive (plasma guns with bouncing bolts in the 25th century and 9mm pop guns in the 1960s), Cortez always has a rather elaborate gravity-manipulating contraption strapped to his wrist that allows him to



DISCO ZOMBIE CHIMPS

AND CYBORG MONKEYS TOO...

As with *TimeSplitters 2, Future Perfect* features challenge, arcade, and multiplayer games outside of the main story mode (which is now fleshed out with much lengthier cut-scenes). Multiplayer is now online, supports up to 16 players, and shares 12 of the 14 arcade modes. As with *TS2*, you can set up all game modes with custom bot settings and custom weapon sets to make the experience truly unique. First, there's deathmatch and team deathmatch, which are both pretty self-explanatory. Next, there's capture the bag and bag tag, the latter of which has just the one bag, the winner being the player who hangs on to it the longest. Variations on deathmatch come in the shape of elimination; vampire mode, which requires you to kill other players in order to get health; and shrink, in which your ranking dictates your physical stature in the game environment. Thief mode has you killing people to collect rewards, while virus is a variation on the tag gameplay in which tagged players catch fire. Zones is a new team game that has you capturing territory by stepping on floor switches, assault has you attacking a fortified base, escort (one of the modes that's not online) is a mission where you have to protect a VIP, and gladiator is a ranked deathmatch game where only the top dog can score points. There's also a bonus arcade mode called monkey assistant that wasn't unlocked in the early version of the game we played.

The challenge modes are where Free Radical's unique sense of humor shines—and also where a lot of the monkey stuff tends to crop up. There are challenges that have you beheading zombie monkeys with a shotgun, a plate-spinning variant that has you electrocuting cyborg monkeys to make them disco dance, plus stuff like blowing up glass jars with proximity mines and sniping beer bottles in a nightclub.

mess with anything in the environment that isn't bolted down. This has the added side effect of handily demonstrating the new physics engine that appears to have been ripped straight out of Free Radical's recent *Second Sight*. Boxes can be moved around rooms, levers can be pulled remotely, and puzzles are made slightly easier in this variation on the mind-control trend of the past year.

Fans of the series will be pleased to hear that the mapmaking feature is back and considerably more complicated than in previous versions. So complicated, in fact, that without the aid of an instruction manual, we had some problems taking advantage of all the myriad features while clumsily tinkering with the early playable code. Unlike in previous versions, you now have much more freedom to build in all three dimensions, and you're also able to script specific rules for events in your level. Weapons, switches, and bad guys can be placed wherever you want, and you can play around with lighting and textures for each individual block that you place. Previous games relied on you to pass memory cards back and forth with your friends in order to distribute maps, but you will be able to share your magnificent creations with other players using a peer-to-peer system within the game shell this time. Select another player who is online at the same time as you, and you can pass files back and forth as you chat in the lobby. Once you've distributed your maps to all of your friends, you can set up custom multiplayer matches for up to 16 buddies with unique maps, rules, bots (if you need to make up numbers), and weapon sets. While this kind of thing has been going on for years on the PC, this is the first time that this degree of freedom has been available in a PS2 game.

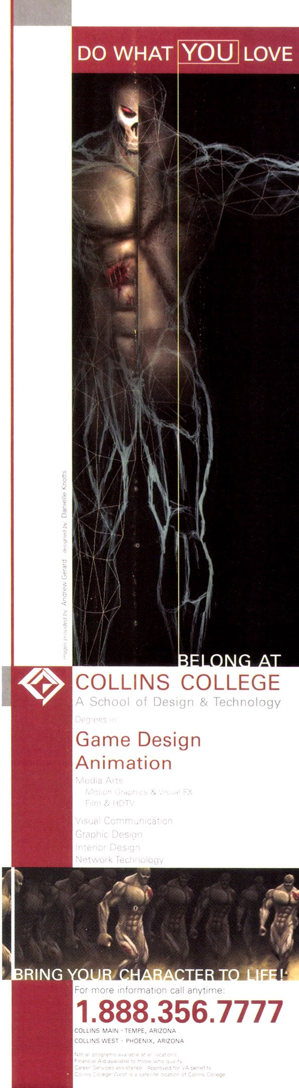
A lot of shooters are arriving over the next few months, as you can no doubt tell from the theme of this issue. Whereas most are serious affairs with elaborate stories and deep mythologies, *Future Perfect* is different in that it's more about just shooting at stuff in a variety of different ways. With the might of EA behind the franchise now, perhaps we'll see it elevated in gamers' perceptions, much as *Burnout 3* was last year. «

FANS WILL BE PLEASED THAT THE MAPMAKING FEATURE IS BACK.

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** Free Radical **Release** March

BE SOMEBODY ELSE

Also as in *TimeSplitters 2*, more than 100 characters are available for you to play in multiplayer, one of whom is the sassy Jo-Beth Casey, pictured here to the left. Some characters are available from the start, but others will need to be unlocked by beating challenges and levels.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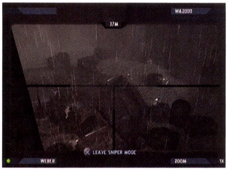

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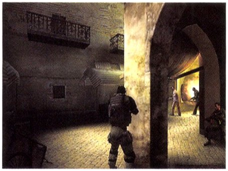
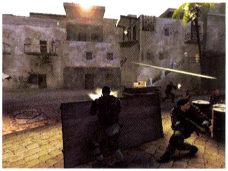
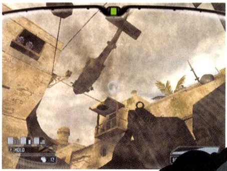






A MORE VIOLENT READING RAINBOW

Rainbow has made two appearances in Clancy's books: *Rainbow Six*, in which the agents fight extreme environmentalists who planned to poison the tourists at the Olympics in Australia; in *The Bear and the Dragon*, Rainbow operatives train Russian Spetsnaz to fight the Chinese.

RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

SNIPER SCHOOL

Rainbow Six has taught us quite a lot about the use of flashbangs, breaching charges, and go codes. It teaches kids that taking out a counterterrorist can require only about three bullets instead of 30. It instructs that there is a specific protocol to opening doors, moving in, and securing the area before going on. In this fourth title, Ubisoft is adding another module to its lesson plan: snipers.

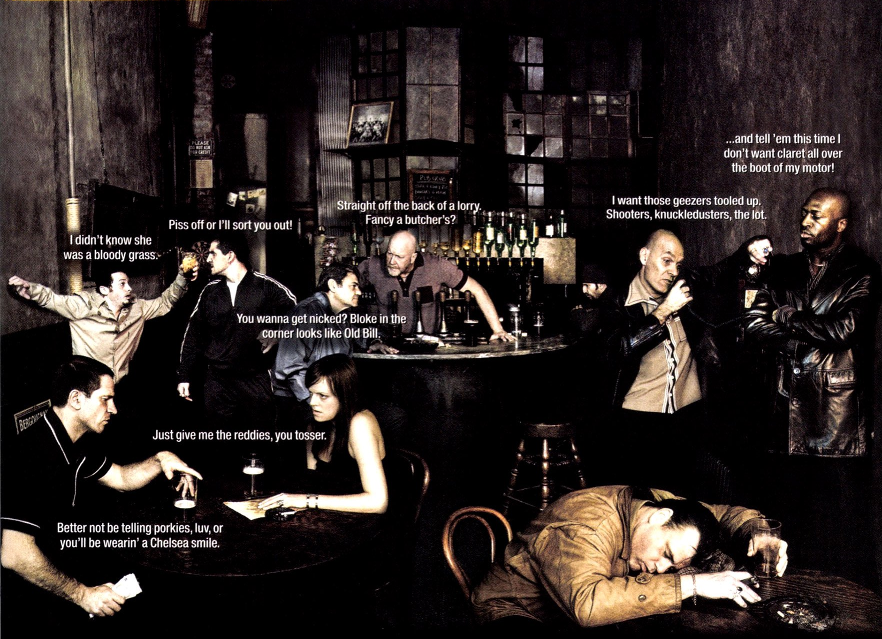
Fact is, snipers aren't fellows who run around waving those massively long rifles and can shoot people in the head from a range of three feet away. They can't just instantly zoom in and snap a shot into someone's head while running across the street. Snipers are support personnel; they hang tight in one spot and provide both intel and firepower. They're the guys who watch the building you're breaching and take care of any fools trying to go in or out while you're working.

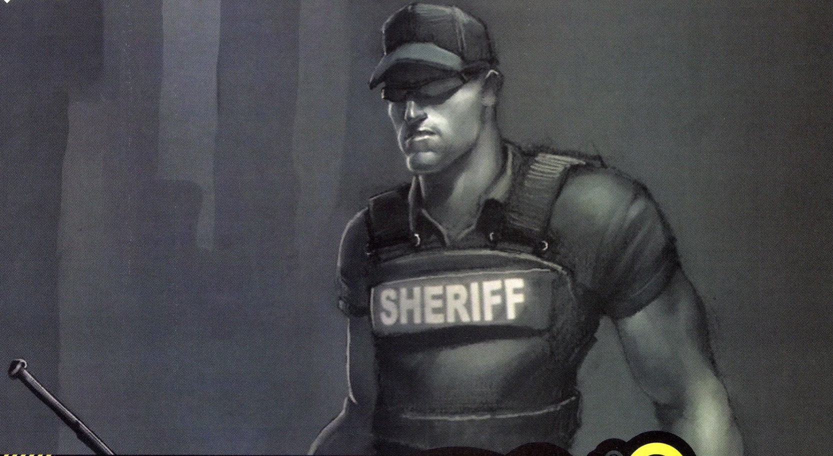
Previous *Rainbow Six* games always cast you as Rainbow One, the team leader who orders everyone else around. Now there will be a separate wing of missions in which you play Dieter Weber, the German sniper. However, you won't play a mission in which all you do is sit in one place and shoot one baddie. One mission starts with Team Rainbow being pinned down by enemy fire within an old castle. Your mission is to cover the team's extraction—meaning you take out enemies from your position high up in a tower and let Team Rainbow concentrate on maneuvering to, and creating, its exit. All this time, they're feeding you enemy positions via radio, and you're encouraged to move about, as some enemies will notice your muzzle flashes and angles of attack, and attempt to flush you out accordingly.

It's not just snipers, though. The story line has Rainbow on the defensive, so there will be more mission types than "run in and clip some terrorists." One mission involves an ambush, and Rainbow's goal is just to run away and live. There's going to be an all-new multiplayer mode, done in the style of *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*—this time it's mercenaries versus Team Rainbow. In these matches, Rainbow brings the flashbangs while the mercs bring the nerve gas. There are a ton of additions that make *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* an actual sequel and not just an expansion, but the overriding lesson learned is this: Snipers are people, too. «

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Red Storm Entertainment **Release** Q1 2005

LEARN TO SPEAK GETAWAY


...and tell 'em this time I don't want claret all over the boot of my motor!
Straight off the back of a lorry. Fancy a butcher's?
I want those geezers tooled up. Shooters, knuckledusters, the lot.
Piss off or I'll sort you out!
I didn't know she was a bloody grass.
You wanna get nicked? Bloke in the corner looks like Old Bill.
Just give me the reddies, you tosser.
Better not be telling porkies, luv, or you'll be wearin' a Chelsea smile.



25 TO LIFE

AFTER CAREFUL DELIBERATION

FOREMAN: In the matter of the People vs. *25 to Life*, a game for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, we, the jury, find the defendant guilty of the following charges:

- Murder in the first degree: The defendant's story mode (written by hip-hop listmaker P. Frank Williams) allows players to become gang members and fight law enforcement in a series of robberies and drug raids. To succeed in this mode, you must work as a team, taking out cops with any weapons you can find and helping out your crew in times of need. It's like Sony's *SOCOM* series, but with fewer tanks and more modified Mercedes blaring out distorted bass in the background.
- Illegal firearm possession: The defendant provides players with a dizzying array of highly questionable weapons, from standard-issue Ingram Mac-10s to AK-47s and the old reliable sawed-off shotgun. In terms of pure firepower, the gangsters in *25 to Life* outclass the policeman's arsenal of baton, Taser, pistol, and long-range rifle. If it weren't for their superior body armor, our forces would be decimated.
- Racketeering: The defendant encourages gang activity by letting teams of cops and thugs combat each other online. Up to 16 people can fire away at each other in *25 to Life*'s urban arenas, tagging walls to earn gang territory and protecting crack houses from police SWAT teams. Even worse, players can also customize their external appearances, creating "uniforms" for their teams and even drawing unique graffiti tags to desecrate peaceful, law-abiding neighborhoods with.
- Noise pollution: Everyone from DMX to Mos Def and Ghostface Killah is on the defendant's soundtrack, and you can switch tunes by visiting the radios dotted around every multiplayer level, creating a municipal nuisance.

Sentencing will be held this spring, when the defendant is released to stores. Court is adjourned. «

Pub. Eidos **Dev.** Avalanche **Release** March

the Getaway Black Monday
How was I supposed to know she was a snitch?
Get lost or I'll hurt you!
I've got some stolen goods. Want to take a look?
You wanna go to jail? Guy in the corner looks like a cop.
Make sure they're armed to the teeth. Guns, brass knuckles...the works.
...and they better not get blood all over the trunk of my car!
Give me the money, you jerk.
You better not be lying, or I'll fix that pretty smile of yours.

Ruthless cops. Vicious criminals. Petty thieves. On the brutal streets of London, they all speak the same language. Learn it. With three playable characters, 25 miles of authentic locations, enhanced graphics and realistic A.I., your life depends on it.

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Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language

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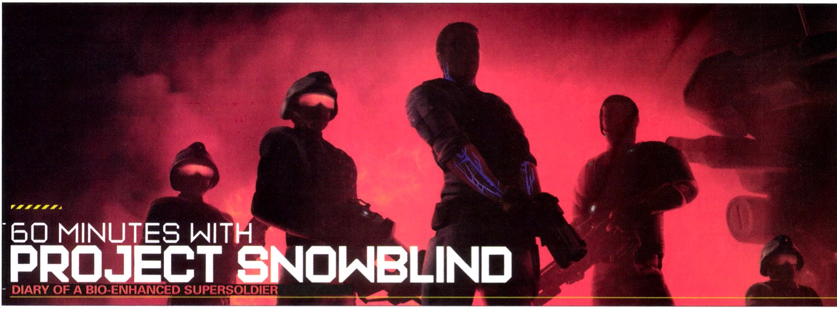
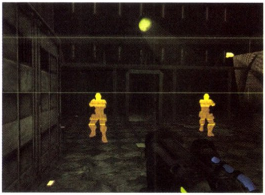
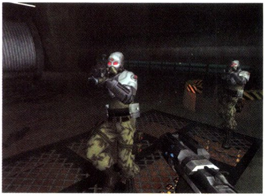


60 MINUTES WITH PROJECT SNOWBLIND

DIARY OF A BIO-ENHANCED SUPERSOLDIER





8:15 P.M. Urban Assault. I drop into the busted-up streets near Kowloon Base with a support staff of four. Four. What do they think I am, some kind of superman? Oh, right—I am. The gaudy neon glows softly in the rain, reflecting off the wet streets. I'd consider it pretty if I weren't being shot at.

8:20 P.M. I take out a dozen enemy troops before my C.O. sends me in to clear out a machine gun emplacement. The guy manning the gun sure looks surprised to see me. Mostly, though, he just looks dead.

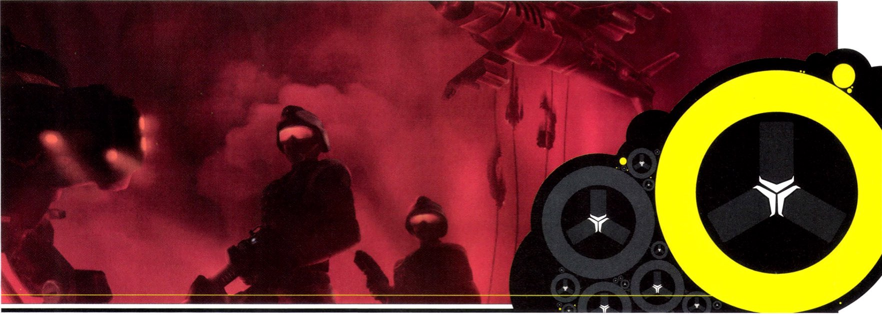
8:23 P.M. I find a field transport and hop in. There's not much armor and it handles a little squirrelly, but damn is it fast. I plow through a horde of bad guys and earn acclaim from my squad.

8:25 P.M. Abandoning the transport, I find a rocket launcher someone carelessly left in an alley. Now that's what I'm talking about. Just in time, too, as a tank lumbers into the narrow street ahead of me. A few well-placed rockets and it's tanks for the memories. Sometimes I kill me.

8:30 P.M. Damn, these bastards are really dug in here; this security tunnel has more bad guys than roaches. I call up one of my biomods—reflex boost—and everything slows to a crawl...everything except me. I dodge bullets like crazy and move in close to give one enemy a face full of buckshot. I alt-fire at another one and learn about the deliciously evil underbelly of my shotgun: It fires sticky bombs. He runs like a little girl. Then he explodes. Shoulda stopped, dropped, and rolled, buddy.

8:40 P.M. I'm crawling up through Kowloon Base. My C.O. wants me to take out four enormous rail turrets, but keep it quiet. Yeah, Chief, I'll get right on that. But first—wait, what the hell are those things? I must have tripped an alarm; suddenly there are little robotic spiders swarming all over. One of 'em zaps me, and my HUD implant goes crazy. I'm one zap away from a full systems crash here and I can't see a damn thing—just static. Oh, right, now I get it: I'm snowblind. Crap.

6:45 A.M. Must have blacked out; suddenly it's morning. I'm inside a temple and I got a Coalition grunt yelling in my ear about how he's



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FRAG
15
25

pinned down and I need to come save his ass. Sure, Sparky, I'll be right there, as soon as I plow through this courtyard loaded with enemy troops and—oh God, is that a robot? A seven-foot-tall, bipedal robot? Oh, this is gonna be a blast. I call up another biomod that creates a portable force field; I'm in my own private sanctuary and this courtyard is just disintegrating. I mean, rock is flying everywhere—it takes about 10 seconds for anything that's not a wall or the floor to be converted into a fine dust that drifts through the place. Nice.

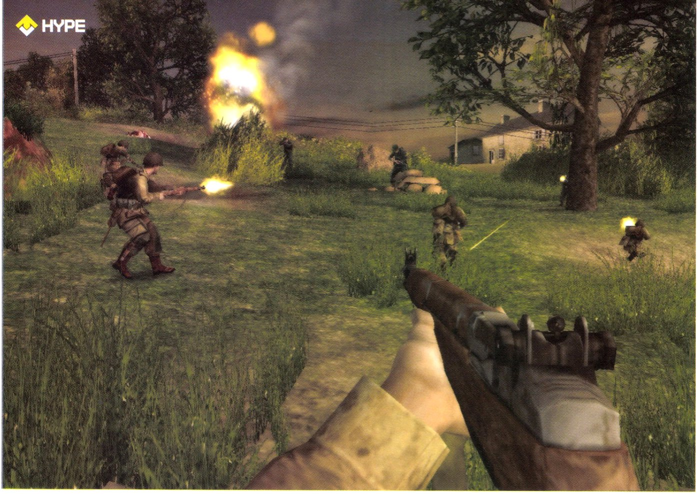
6:48 A.M. Robot versus rocket launcher—I'm writing this, so you know who won, but it was close.

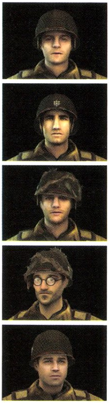
6:50 A.M. Some smartass has been hiding in the rubble. He pops out and hits me with an EMP grenade. I'm trying to flip on my force field again in case he's looking to do a follow-up when I learn what the EMP was for: All systems are down. No HUD, no force field, no slowing down time, no night vision, no invisibility—I am pure human for the first time in as long as I can remember. Luckily, my systems come back online before I have time to hang myself.

7:00 A.M. Damn, this place is beautiful.

7:15 A.M. I try to pull Pittman's ass out of the fire but end up pulling my own into it. We perform a retrograde maneuver into the basement, where he shows me his toys: about a metric ton of deadly metal in at least 31 flavors. We head topside just in time to meet the welcoming committee. I pull out my newly acquired fléchette gun and alt-fire a swarm of super-electrified hornets to home in on our guests. They try to fend the hornets off by shooting wildly into the swarm, but mainly end up hitting each other. This strikes me as extremely funny. I'm pulling out every trick in the bag: releasing spider drones, going invisible, dropping gas grenades and flashbangs. Finally I throw down a riot shield for cover and start lobbing frag grenades, detonating them just over the heads of the crowd. Bodies fly everywhere. Life is good. Short, maybe. But good. «

Pub. Eidos **Dev.** Crystal Dynamics **Release** February





SOME REAL BROTHERS

BIA specifically covers the experience of the 502nd Regiment from June 6 to 13. A key mission takes place in Carentan, a town strategically placed between Omaha and Utah beaches; to "preview" the mission, watch the third episode of HBO's *Band of Brothers*.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

FIRING A SALVO OF REALISM TOWARD THE WORLD WAR II GENRE

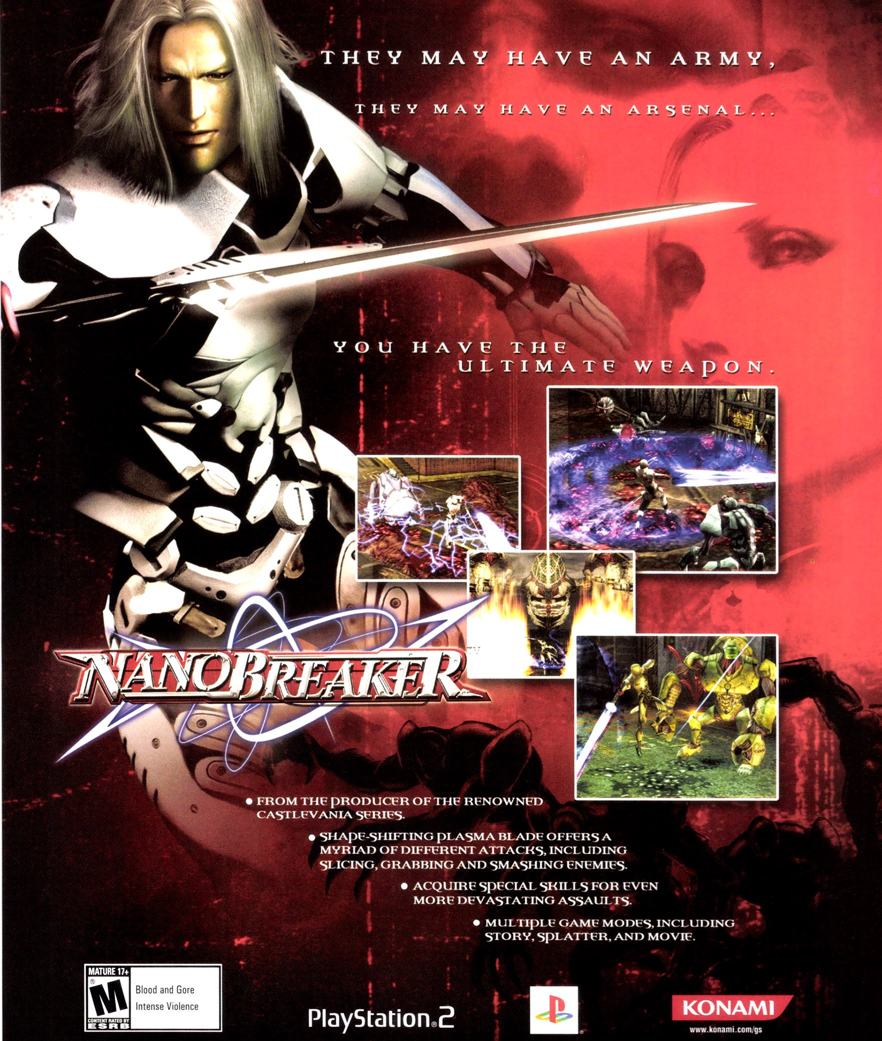
You are not a chimpanzee. So why are you playing a first-person shooter that treats you like one?

That's been the rub with the entire World War II blast-em-up genre since *Medal of Honor* invented it in 1999. From the odd lack of real violence to the Japanese troops lining up to get machine-gunned, most WWII "sims" are more into creating thrill rides than confronting you with a serious story and setting. Can you name the hero of any *Medal of Honor* title? Didn't think so.

Brothers in Arms, created under the guidance of a retired Army colonel who joined the development team instead of shipping off to Iraq, will try to buck the trend by giving the player some actual responsibility. As a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division, you take command of up to six men at once—divided into two separate teams—over the course of your missions (which are set during an eight-day interval of the Normandy invasion). With a couple tugs on the shoulder buttons, it's a snap to set a squad to a position and then have them fire or charge upon hapless German soldiers. Get it right, and you'll have your crew laying down oppressive fire like pros—and after your buddies pin down a sniper with gunfire, you can sneak around and ambush the guy from the rear. Sound like too much to handle? Don't throw down your carbine quite yet: Squad direction takes just a few minutes to learn, and before long you'll be controlling your buddies (all taken from the stock WWII-movie character pool) with ease.

That's where the difference could lie with *Brothers in Arms*. Instead of putting you through the motions of warfare, *Brothers* expects you to be the vanguard of attack and the guardian of your fire team at the same time. How much this feeling moves players could make or break the game this spring. « *Kevin Gifford*

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Gearbox/Ubisoft Shanghai **Release** Q1 2005


THEY MAY HAVE AN ARMY,
THEY MAY HAVE AN ARSENAL...
YOU HAVE THE ULTIMATE WEAPON.
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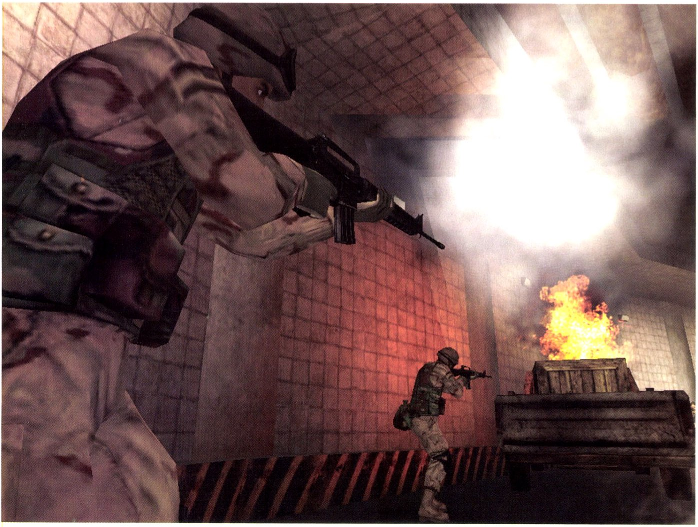


UBISOFT LOVES WAR

Er, what is it with Ubisoft and war? Three of its games in this issue—this one, *Rainbow Six: Lockdown*, and *Brothers in Arms*—all involve men in uniform using guns on each other. Is Ubisoft run by a council of warmongering Frenchmen? Or does it just think we violence-loving Americans have an unsatiable thirst for military-enhanced war games?

AMERICA'S ARMY

UNCLE SAM WANTS YOU...ON THE PS2

E3 2002 saw the most unique new developer enter the gaming industry: the United States Army.

America's Army for the PC was an oddity because it was a pretty good multiplayer shooter developed by the U.S. Army. In fact, the development team was an actual department within the Army (the MOVES—Modeling, Virtual Environment, and Simulation Institute—staffed at the Naval Postgraduate School). It crafted a game that not only played well, but also imparted basic U.S. Army training fundamentals. Finally, the game was free to download—but then again, the funding did technically come from our tax dollars, so it wasn't "free free" if you want to argue semantics.

Now, the Army is putting the recruitment drive on the console.

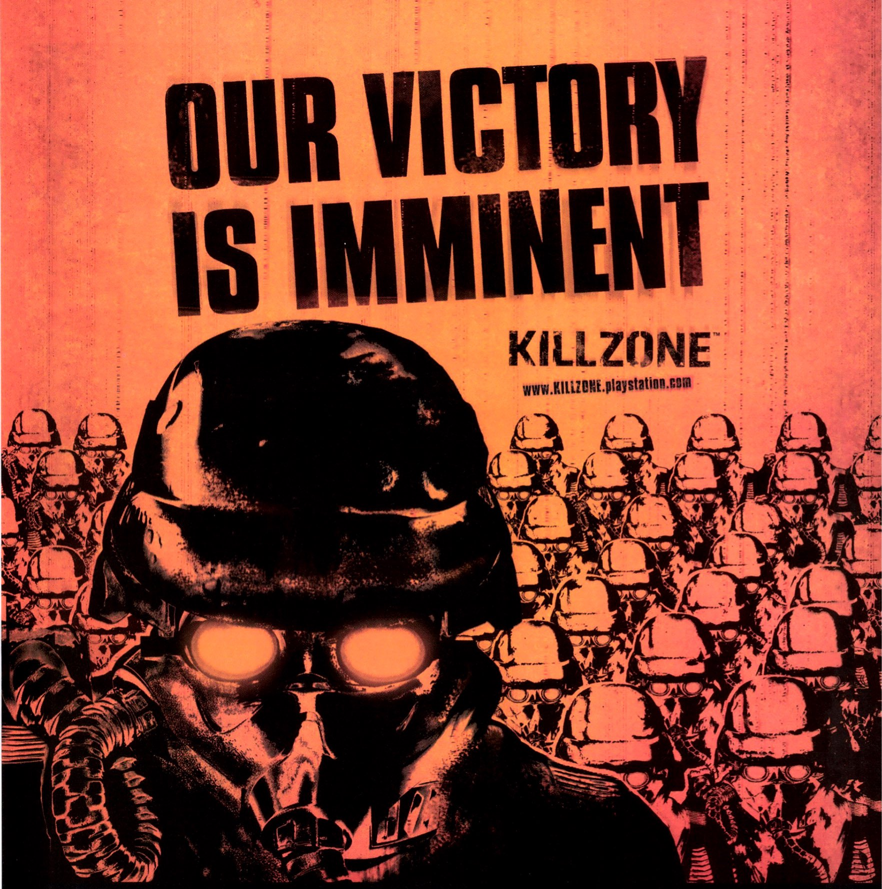
This time it isn't working alone, though, as it has drafted another developer, Secret Level (codeveloper of the console version of the Unreal engine), to help on the game. Rather than create a free multiplayer-only game, Secret Level is creating a whole game—that is, a package that contains single and multiplayer. The single-player mode will encompass the career of your soldier, who starts as a recruit in basic training and eventually becomes a Special Forces team leader.

This mode is filled with skill points and team hijinks. You get points during missions or training sessions and pour them into skills to develop your virtual Army man. You also start off as a member of an eight-man fire team and eventually work your way to becoming team leader and calling the shots. Since the original PC game did a pretty good job of simulating Army training courses, the single-player game is expected to have a realistic depiction of a soldier's career.

While all this work is being put into single player, multiplayer will probably be largely similar to what's in the PC version. So expect to find splitscreen and 16-player online play combined with an online career mode that lets you develop a soldier online (no confirmation on whether you can take your soldier from single into multiplayer).

All in all, while the game itself sounds intriguing, the most interesting aspect will be its release. While there is a full single-player game that Ubisoft feels is equal in value to any other action game on the shelf, it will still be somewhat of an odd disconnect to see the "free" Army game now become a full-priced product. We'll keep an eye out on how effective this recruitment drive turns out to be. «

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Secret Level **Release** April



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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PlayStation®2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

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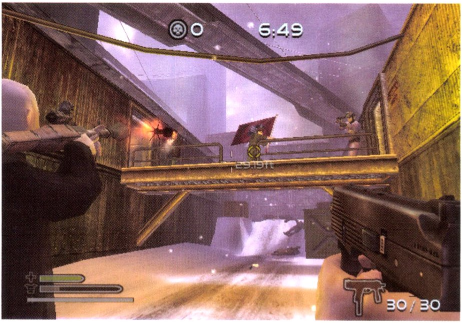

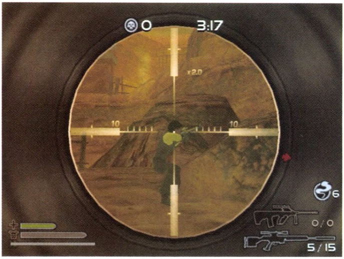

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36.65ft
66.80ft
Mox

SPIES LIKE US
There's a whole lotta multiplayer skins, so no one in a multiplayer match will look the same. Now's your chance to shoot around as an anonymous Chinese executive!

COLD WINTER

COMING IN FROM THE COLD

Cold Winter is a harsh and gritty look at espionage, no martinis or social functions here. The first level isn't a glamorous operation with a nice explosion and a death-defying stunt—it's a manic escape from a Chinese prison. Enemies don't roll over after being shot—their flesh gets torn apart by automatic gunfire or the air is filled with their screams after they are torched with a flamethrower. You don't get a fun little watch that shoots lasers and mixes your drinks—you loot bodies for munitions and hastily shove rags into a bottle full of petrol to create a makeshift bomb.

Cold Winter pairs its rough portrayal of espionage with traditional gameplay enhanced by some important additions. The ability to use everyday objects, combined with the game's physics, means that you can knock tables over to provide cover, throw exploding barrels at enemies, or use trash cans as makeshift shields. You can either conduct a conventional key hunt or find some wire cutters and a metal shard to make a lockpick.

While the single-player game is a portrayal of real-world "dirty" espionage, the multiplayer is best described as an odd fusion of *TimeSplitters* and *Counter-Strike*. While it doesn't have the hyperspeed of *TimeSplitters*, both the character speed and pacing of a multiplayer match are more akin to *TS* than to other PS2 shooters. Helping its fast and furious pacing are the beautifully balanced 30-some weapons—ranging from silenced pistols to automatic shotguns to vicious-sounding flamethrowers—which give the game that *Counter-Strike* feel. The weapons look and feel like *CS* ones, and you can play in normal, realistic, or lethal damage mode (in realistic about three hits will kill you, while in lethal you'll go down after one hit). The main goal of *CW*'s multiplayer is to have it feel like a hardcore PC shooter—hence the numerous weapons, the faster speed, and the level design that encourages constant motion. Heck, the host of the game can specify a custom weapon loadout—the same map might host a "pistols only" match or a match replete with heavies like flamethrowers and automatic shotguns.

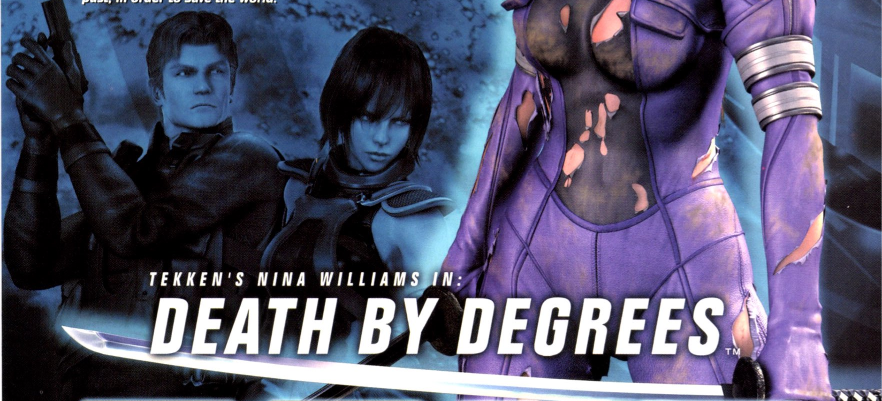
CW's use of combined items comes into play in multiplayer. You can harvest the levels for items to create makeshift Molotov cocktails, time bombs, and motion sensors—then string these items into lethal combinations, like motion-sensing firebombs that are then obscured by smoke grenades. All of these options are applicable to every game type, whether it be deathmatch, king of the hill, or a last-man-standing contest.

Many shooters claim to redefine the genre, but what makes *Cold Winter* worth watching is its attempt to mix tried-and-true FPS gameplay, a dark story, PC FPS sensibilities, and a few key innovations into a package that looks, feels, and plays rough. «

Pub. Vivendi Universal Games **Dev.** Swordfish Studios **Release** April

Tekken's Nina Williams is even deadlier undercover.

As a covert operative of the CIA, Nina Williams enters an underground fighting tournament to track Kometa, a shadowy underworld organization. Functioning as the "sweeper" of her cell, Nina finds herself tracking a stolen high-tech weapon through a variety of locations to reveal a conspiracy on a global scale. Nina must now face a multitude of deadly enemies, as well as her own past, in order to save the world.

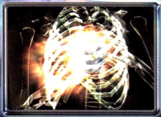


TEKKEN'S NINA WILLIAMS IN:

DEATH BY DEGREES™

> Control Nina with an intuitive 360-degree combat system

> Wield a variety of weapons



> Burst organs, shatter bones

> Deliver Nina's signature moves outside the ring

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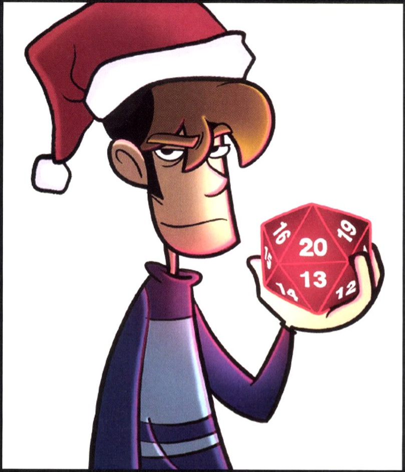
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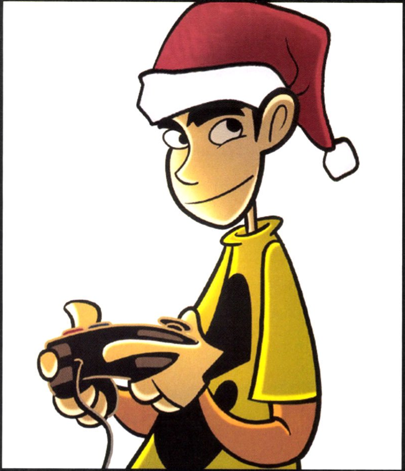


FACE TIME
Jerry Holkins (left) and Mike Krahulik, seen here beneath their *Penny Arcade* counterparts Tycho and Gabe, had no idea how much of an impact Child's Play would make. Below: some of the one-of-a-kind gaming items up for auction at the charity dinner.

MYST
REVELATION
MYST
URU
PENNY ARCADE
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
COLLECTOR'S EDITION

CHILD'S PLAY 2004

PENNY ARCADE ONCE AGAIN HARNESSES THE POWER OF GAMES

A HOLIDAY MIRACLE
Above: just a small sampling of the truckloads of toys going out to hospitals across the country. Inset: Krahulik and Holkins as dapper charity-dinner emcees.

Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins are in many ways your typical gaming geeks. They spend most of their time checking out the new releases, getting groups of friends together to play multiplayer games, and dashing off screeds about the pitiful state of videogame movies. But three times a week Krahulik and Holkins get together to craft a new installment of one of the most widely read comics on the Internet: *Penny Arcade*.

Chronicling the gamecentric lives of Krahulik and Holkins' comic alter egos, Gabe and Tycho, *Penny Arcade* is one of the more astounding success stories on the Internet. From its humble beginnings in 1998, the strip swiftly became a cult classic. Over its six-year run, *Penny Arcade* developed such a large and devoted readership that Krahulik and Holkins were able to turn it into a full-time source of income. Their brutally sharp musings on videogames and the industry earned them a great deal of credibility and respect. Their opinions were considered so powerful that game publishers began inviting them to their studios to check out games before release. Their readership was so significant that links included in their thrice-weekly news posts often brought the target servers to their knees (a phenomenon Krahulik and Holkins dubbed "wanging").

It didn't take long for them to start thinking about more practical uses for the strip's Internet cred. "About four years ago," Krahulik tells us, "we decided that we wanted to do something that would sort of use the power that *Penny Arcade* had, to get all these people together to do something other than destroy someone else's website or ruin a forum—you know, do something actually good."

In 2003, they came up with the idea of organizing a charity drive for the Seattle Children's Hospital. Child's Play would be a way for gamers to brighten the lives of hospitalized children. "We had the idea: Why not give these kids games?" says Krahulik. "They're in a position where they can really use some entertainment like that. From there it sort of grew; people were like, 'What if I don't just want to buy them a game? What if I want to buy them a book, too?' And that's when it sort of exploded." The first Child's Play went on to raise over $250,000 in toys and cash donations. Let's say that again: $250,000. Over a quarter of a million dollars raised by gamers looking to help out sick kids around the holidays.

"We had no idea what to expect," admits Krahulik. "In fact, we told people they should send the toys to my house. That didn't last very long. My garage filled up, my living room filled up, and pretty soon we had to have a company donate some warehouse space. It got way out of hand."

After Krahulik, Holkins, and an ever-growing staff of volunteers had sorted through the literal truckloads of toys and games, talk soon turned to the future. How would they top the performance of 2003? How could they streamline the process so that the donations were handled more quickly and efficiently? And what could they do to get more people interested in participating in this momentous event?

The first step was expanding the charity's reach. When Child's Play 2004 opened in October, it offered wish lists not just for the Seattle hospital, but also for children's hospitals in Oakland, San Diego, Houston, and Washington, D.C. Now gamers across the country could contribute to a hospital closer to home.

Then Krahulik and Holkins started talking about hosting an event to help raise awareness of the charity. "Jerry and I were having dinner one day," says Krahulik, "and I was like, 'You know, every charity has one of these charity dinners. We should do it! And we should all get dressed up and have hors d'oeuvres and champagne!' And we just laughed and laughed, you know? The idea was just absurd. But we have a guy who works for us named Robert who actually takes our crazy ideas and makes them real. And so pretty soon we were going to have this event, and we had to rent tuxes, and it was awesome."

The event, held in Seattle on December 9, 2004, featured a formal dinner, two auctions which allowed attendees to bid on one-of-a-kind gaming-related items, and a presentation by the Seattle Children's Hospital. Nearly 300 attendees paid $100 a plate (or $150 per couple) to be there, and the night ended up raising $17,000 for the charity.

> "OUR GOAL WAS TO BEAT OUR SCORE FROM LAST YEAR...."

All their efforts appear to have paid off. "We probably won't have the final numbers for awhile," says Krahulik, "since we had a lot of companies that were going to donate a certain percentage of their sales during the month of December, and it will be a while before those numbers come in. But right now we're at about $310,000. Our goal was to beat our score from last year, and we did that, so we're happy, you know?"

With $310,000 raised before counting the contributions of companies like PopCap Games or E-ZQual Mortgage, it's likely they've beaten their score by quite a lot. So how will they top it next year?

"Obviously, we want to do more hospitals," says Krahulik. "This year we bumped it up to five from one, which I thought was really cool. But the main thing we heard this year was, 'I'd like to be able to donate to the hospital in my city.' So, some way that we can facilitate that, I think, we'll be trying to do that."

Interested in helping out next year? Visit www.childsplaycharity.org and learn how you can get involved! «

COLD FEAR

IT'S RAINING DEAD MEN!

When *Cold Fear's* mix of tension and tactical action slides into your PS2, you can thank Gunther Galipot, a creative director at Ubisoft who created a little something called *Pandora Tomorrow* multiplayer. While the game has been in development for 18 months, he took an active hand during the later end of development and helped retune, and at times reconfigure, the game to what it is now.

Originally signed by Ubisoft last year, *Cold Fear* was a pretty basic survival-horror game. Coast Guard guy Hansen gets called to a boat and finds himself shooting up zombies. Yawn. Galipot's goal was not only to add more action, but to make that action more tense and tactical. So, while you're still a Coast Guard dude checking out a zombie-filled boat, the actual gameplay is now significantly different.

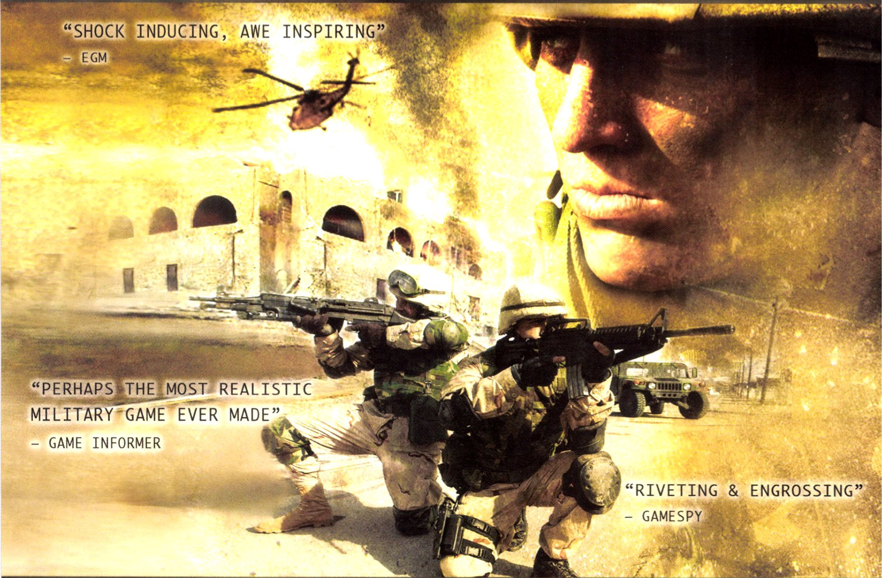
Originally, the action was pretty straightforward "shoot the zombies!" stuff. Galipot's tweaks included interactive environments and randomization of enemy behavior. The mutated humans you fight can do anything from run at you furiously à la *28 Days Later/Dawn of the Dead* (the 2004 remake) to lurch forward menacingly—some will try to eat you while others will be content to cut you apart with rusty knives. Besides mutants, you'll also be taking down normal people (Russian mercenaries who actually speak Russian, not Boris-and-Natasha-style English) and even weirder mutant beasties: critters like a monster whose screams can turn off the lights (don't ask us how); a little face-hugger-like thing that reanimates corpses at random; or an invisible creature that can only be seen with fire. Yet these baddies also hate each other, and you can exploit their aggression toward each other during combat. Or, since the boat is rocking back and forth and in pretty crappy condition, you can use the swinging hooks, live wires, and ocean waves to kill your enemies as well.

Galipot also created a new weapon, a speargun that fires spears coated with a specific chemical that attracts the mutants. This weapon has tactical uses like luring enemies into traps or distracting them away from you to let you shoot them. You can even shoot a spear into an enemy and make the other enemies attack the bait. Sure, you can go through the whole game just shooting bad guys with a pistol if you really want to, but Galipot says that he wanted to reward players who also think while they shoot.

Galipot's ultimate purpose is to create a rhythmic sense of gameplay, where the player's tense exploration and puzzle-solving are punctuated with frantic tactical action that features emergent gameplay situations rather than your standard canned, scripted events. It's pretty easy to look at some screens and early footage and dismiss *Cold Fear* as *"Resident Evil 4* on a boat," but Galipot's contributions should make it a unique experience for fans of survival horror. «

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Darkworks **Release** March

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR™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– EGM
"PERHAPS THE MOST REALISTIC MILITARY GAME EVER MADE"
– GAME INFORMER
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– GAMESPY

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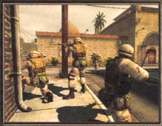

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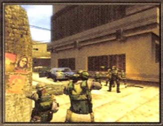

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Strong Language
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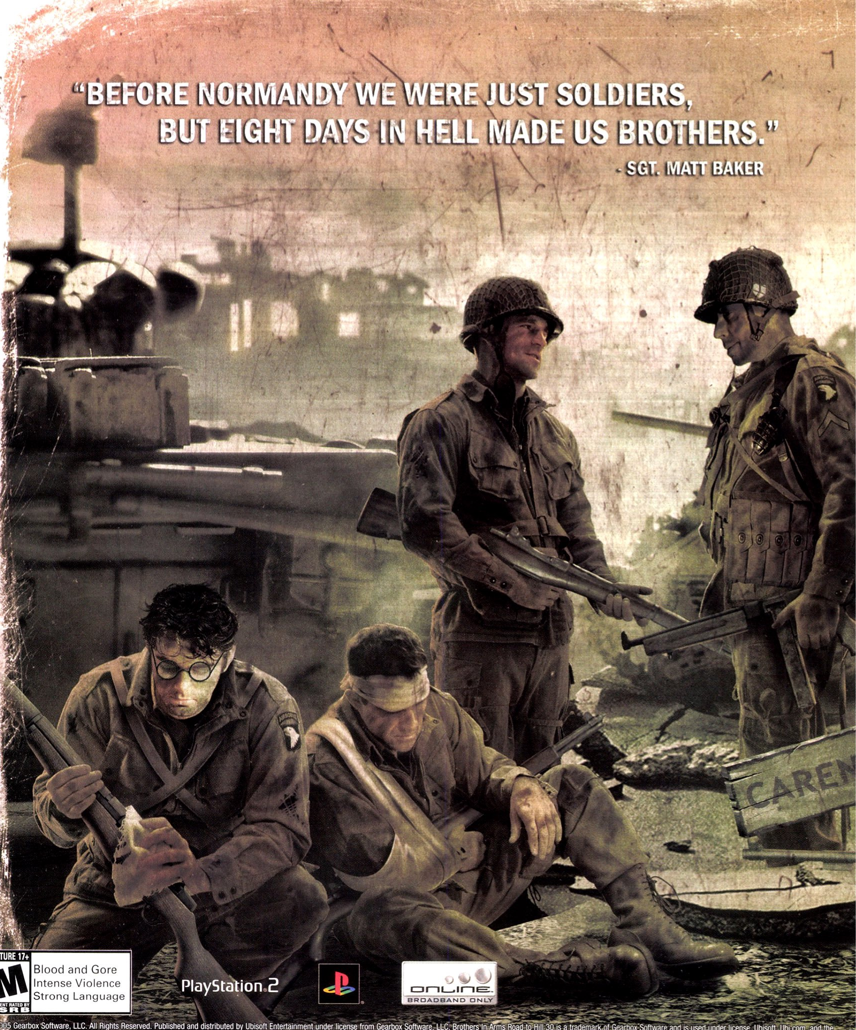
"BEFORE NORMANDY WE WERE JUST SOLDIERS,
BUT EIGHT DAYS IN HELL MADE US BROTHERS."
- SGT. MATT BAKER
CAREN
MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
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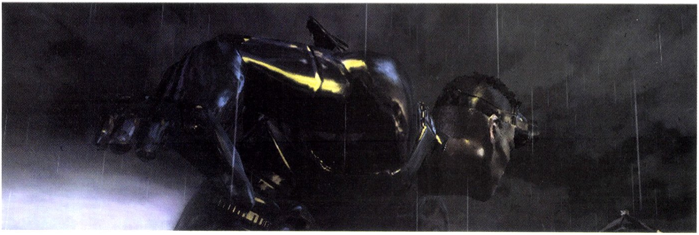


ELECTRONIC ARTS' SPENDING SPREE

If you haven't noticed by now, EA is serious when it comes to retaining its lead as the world's largest publisher. Games like *Splinter Cell* and *Ghost Recon* would help the company bolster a lineup that's pretty much devoid of any good stealth or tactical first-person shooters.

UBISOFT FOR SALE?

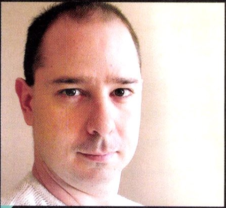
NOT IF FRANCE HAS ITS WAY

In mid-December, Electronic Arts announced that it would purchase a 19.9 percent stake in Ubisoft, which is largely seen as a hostile takeover attempt by EA that will eventually lead to the company acquiring popular franchises, specifically those found under the Tom Clancy label. Interestingly, both Vivendi Universal and Infogrames (both headquartered in France) seemed to put forth an effort that would prevent EA from taking control of Ubisoft. Vivendi reportedly entered into preliminary merger talks with Ubisoft, but later denied that any such talks were taking place. Infogrames was a little more forthcoming on the issue, saying that it would do what it could to prevent EA from gaining additional ground in Europe, but doesn't exactly have adequate resources to do so.

So, what's happening now? The French industry minister, Patrick Devedjian, has since stepped in and engaged in talks with Ubisoft management to discuss the move by EA. The French government actively invests in its videogame companies to help promote French design culture around the world. Last year, the French government even offered 4 million euros (approximately $5.2 million) to aspiring French game developers looking to get their projects off the ground without the aid of a big-name publisher. It's this dedication that will ultimately prove to be a major hurdle for EA to overcome if it wants to take full control of Ubisoft. «

THE WATCHDOG

TOO TIRED FOR THE FIRST AMENDMENT



JOHN SCALZI
is our man keeping an eye on things for the benefit of all gamers. You can see more of his thoughts at www.scalzi.com.

Parents of Illinois: Your governor thinks you are idiots.

That was the subtext of a December op-ed piece that Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich wrote for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, defending his proposal to regulate the purchase of violent and sexually explicit videogames by minors. As his rationale for government censorship, Blagojevich wrote: "Parents have enough to worry about already. Making a living, running a household, and doing all of the hard work it takes to raise a family is exhausting enough. Being expected to know the content of each and every videogame is too much to ask."

Right. We should suspend the First Amendment of the United States Constitution because people are *tired*.

Because it's fun and instructional, let's take a hammer to Gov. Blagojevich's reasoning. First and most obviously, parents don't need to know the content of each and every videogame out there—just the content of the videogames that come into their own homes, which (unless the family is obscenely rich) narrows the scope significantly. Second, thanks to the efforts of the ESRB, every game comes with a rating prominently displayed on the front of the box. Advertisements of the games on TV and in print have the rating displayed, too. When responsible game reviewers review the games, they note the rating, as they do here in *OPM*. And on many games the rating is even printed on the game disc. When you get down to it, it's hard to *miss* the rating.

ONE WOMAN EXPRESSED SHOCK THAT "M" STOOD FOR "MATURE."

When having a general idea of the content of a game is as simple as looking at the game disc itself, one can reasonably ask: How stupid do you have to be not to know the gist of a game and if it meets your standards? The answer: fairly stupid, or at least unconscionably lazy. In a recent *New York Times* article about game ratings, one mother expressed shock that the ESRB rating "M" stood for "mature"—her kids had been telling her it meant "mild." But as the word "Mature" is actually part of the rating's graphic design (go look, I'll wait), all this means is that she wasn't paying attention to what her children were doing *in her own home.*

Look, I don't take a backseat to anyone when it comes to defending the right of parents to know what their kids are doing, and that includes with videogames. And I believe gamemakers and in particular retailers must have parents' backs in their efforts to control (or at least monitor) their kids' game consumption. But implicit in this is the assumption that parents themselves do at least a minimal amount of parenting. Yes, making a living, running a household, and doing all of the hard work it takes to raise a family is exhausting. I speak from experience. And yet, somehow I manage to find the time as a parent to take a quick downward glance at the games my daughter grabs off the store shelves, look at their ratings, and then say yes or no.

See? No government intervention required. But then, I don't live in Illinois. And I'm definitely not an idiot. «

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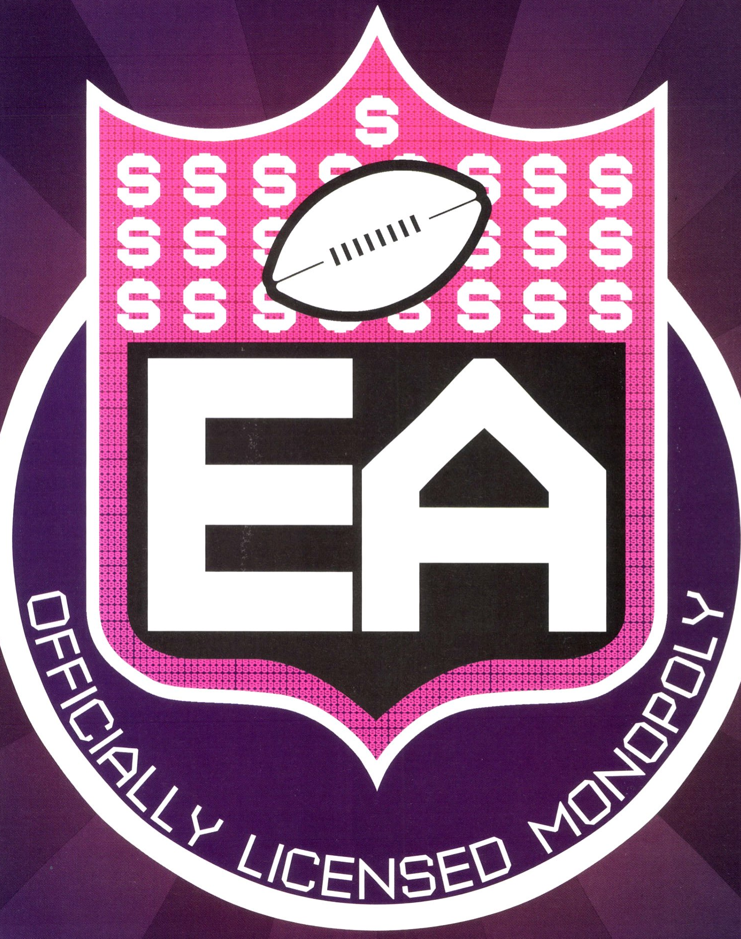

EA
OFFICIALLY LICENSED MONOPOLY

THE NFL AND EA KILL COMPETITION

WHAT EA'S EXCLUSIVE DEAL WITH THE NFL ACTUALLY MEANS

On December 13, 2004—an unlucky day, indeed—Electronic Arts and the NFL shook hands on a five-year deal that gave EA exclusive rights to all things NFL. In short order, EA has garnered full control over the most profitable, best-selling wedge of the sports-videogame pie, ensuring that no one else will get a slice. NFL players, stadiums, team uniforms, and logos are all available to EA Sports' *Madden* and *NFL Street* franchises—but no one else. In a genre based on competition, this makes *Madden* a sort of monopoly, effectively killing off the *NFL 2K* series, the biggest threat to EA's long-standing and legendary franchise.

While this sent shock waves through the gaming industry, it's a maneuver that's been in the works for some time. In early 2004, the NFL put out a call for bids from different companies that were sharing the NFL license. It comes as no surprise that financial powerhouse EA won the bidding. After all, its *Madden* franchise has been a top seller for years, selling more than 40 million copies.

Gene Goldberg, the NFL's VP of consumer products, states, "We chose EA based on game quality, marketing ability, and track record." Sensible, considering *Madden* has been sports-gaming's flagship franchise, is an annual sales-chart topper, was recently displayed at the Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, and has maintained a superb level of quality since its debut 15 years ago. Goldberg was quick to point out that there is "a lot of self-imposed pressure to improve the product to make it stand out in a robust and diverse marketplace."

But many in the gaming industry are begging for a ref to throw the yellow flag for competitive interference, one of whom is Take-Two spokesperson Ed Nebb. "We believe that the decisions of the National Football League and Players Inc. to grant an exclusive license for videogames do a tremendous disservice to the consumers and sports fans whose funds ultimately support the NFL," Nebb says, "by limiting their choices, curbing creativity, and almost certainly leading to higher game prices."

Let's address Nebb's points separately.

First, there's no question that this maneuver limits gamers' choices if they're looking for an NFL-aided experience: There will be *Madden* or *NFL Street*. Rumors are also swirling that there is a *Madden* manager in the works that will allow users to micromanage NFL teams without dealing with on-field gameplay, but gamers looking for plain old football are left with one choice.

Second, does this move curb creativity? Look at the history. When Sony's recklessly terrible *GameDay* was *Madden*'s main unthreatening competition, EA did very little in the way of advancing its game, adding only limited annual updates. But once the ESPN franchise came over from Dreamcast, posing a serious threat to *Madden*'s king-of-the-gridiron status, EA made highly innovative changes to *Madden*, particularly in the last two seasons. Without impetus to outdo the competition, it stands to reason that the series could very possibly stagnate.

THIS MANEUVER BY EA LIMITS GAMERS' CHOICES.

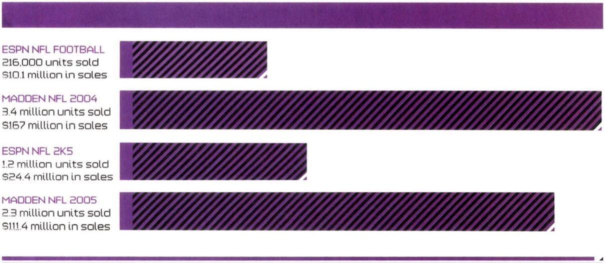
EA spokesperson Trudy Muller disagrees, saying, "The pressure is on us to deliver the best football game ever; that's the same pressure that is on us every year. We strive to innovate and deliver a football game worthy of the fans who play it. EA carries the responsibility for giving fans a quality experience so that they sign up for another season of fun."

But Tim DaRosa, Midway's media relations manager, has another opinion. "The Sony and EA football wars in the PS1 days were a great soap opera, and Sega versus EA in football has been a fun thing to watch unfold year to year," DaRosa says. "With these 'football wars' gone, EA has no market competition to push them further. Their games are excellent now, but we'll see how it goes over the coming years."

Third, there's the question of higher game prices. While nothing has been officially announced, industry insiders say the final cost of the NFL deal is somewhere north of $300 million, a whopping sum that consumers will ultimately pay for. When asked to respond to Nebb's com-

BY THE NUMBERS

How exactly does the competition stack up? Below is how Madden and ESPN have sold over the last two years.



Source: The NPD Group/NPD Funworld, data measures through November 2004

ment about higher prices, EA's Muller said, "While *Madden* is a premium franchise, prices are dictated by market conditions, so anything else you hear about higher prices are just rumors."

While it doesn't make sense that EA would hike the price above $50—the market standard for PS2 games—EA has eliminated *ESPN NFL 2K*'s budget franchise. Thus, consumers are ultimately paying more, because there's no choice to pay less.

Still, while this is a bold and powerful move—one that borders on predatory licensing, aimed solely to drive companies out of business—it's easy to view this exclusivity as a terrible injustice. But Midway's DaRosa isn't overreacting.

"Football is the biggest sports-game segment in videogames, but those sales have been driven by EA's success with the NFL license over many years," DaRosa says. "If you look back, those sales have been so dominant in terms of revenues that if you're the NFL, it's a pretty easy decision to make. Honestly, I don't think it's a bad thing, because gamers on all platforms have been choosing *Madden* by a wide margin for years. Most purchasers of Sega's game this year bought *Madden* at full price and Sega at $20."

DaRosa's argument is a sensible one—*Madden* has dominated. So what about exclusive licenses for other major sports leagues? On January 10, 2005, EA signed an exclusive four-year deal with the Arena Football League, but this lesser-known league has barely been touched aside from Midway's *Kurt Warner's Arena Football*, so the move made few ripples in the industry. The real question is, will the NBA and MLB go the way of the NFL?

According to the *New York Post*, Sal LaRocca, the NBA's head of global merchandising, said, "Talks with one group are in the preliminary stages." An NBA exclusivity deal will be a tougher sale, for sure. EA's *Live* hasn't gobbled up competition as *Madden* has and hasn't been the top-rated hoops game, either.

"I'd expect [EA] to try, but I don't think it will be possible to lock in all the leagues in every sport," says DaRosa. "They don't have exactly the same sort of dominance in basketball that they did in football from a revenues standpoint." Plus, there are more players (Sega, Midway, 989) in the video basketball game than in football, meaning the NBA would likely lose money from such a deal.

But the question remains: How long before the billion-dollar EA swallows up another major league license? Chances are MLB and the NBA want to see how the NFL deal shakes out. Breaking it down remedially, EA is a clear long-term winner in the NFL agreement. Don't be fooled into thinking the EA/NFL handshake is only a five-year pact. Ultimately, this is a limiting move for the NFL. In five years, EA will be the only company that has created every NFL player likeness—a pricey, iterative process. A company outbidding EA, manufacturing an out-of-the-gate *Madden*-beater, and creating 1,400 NFL player likenesses would be not only a seriously massive (and expensive) undertaking, but a highly unlikely one. Only Microsoft would have the capital to outbid EA, and it's smart enough to pick its battles.

IT'S EASY TO VIEW THIS EXCLUSIVITY AS AN INJUSTICE.

As for MLB, apparently at least one publisher has re-upped for three more years, so EA's exclusivity buck—for now—stops here with the NFL.

So, what does all this add up to for ESPN's *NFL 2K* franchise? Only ESPN knows, and it isn't talking. An unlicensed football game in today's marketplace is a colossal risk, and some speculate Sony will turn its NFL game into an NCAA version. But Midway, a former licensee of the NFL, is ecstatic about the timing of the EA/NFL announcement. Midway gave up the NFL license to make *Blitz: Playmakers*, a *Blitz* game that shakes off the inhibiting rules of the No Fun League.

If anything, the stir and shock over the EA/NFL indicates a certain naïveté on the part of the industry. The fact is, EA has scored a financial touchdown with this arrangement. Now we'll have to wait to see if it'll soon score a slam dunk and a home run. « *Todd Zuniga*

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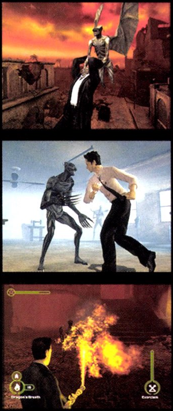

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FIFA STREET

NO HARM, NO FOUL

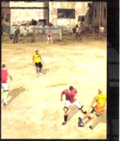
We may not see much of it here in the States, but the street-soccer phenomenon continues to grow on a worldwide scale. In fact, it's so popular in Europe that there's even a World Cup of sorts for street soccer that features homeless people. Yes, that's right. If you're homeless and good at soccer, then you can live the dream in Europe. There are even events similar to the AND1 street-basketball exhibitions that showcase just how insanely talented some of the best street-soccer players are. Fortunately for you, you don't have to be a homeless European or some kind of crazy soccer wizard to participate in *FIFA Street*'s 4-on-4 action.

As you might suspect, the game is set up similarly to EA's other *Street* games. You can create your own player and assemble a squad that travels around the world to take on all sorts of competitors. With each win, you earn points that you can use to pick up new players or enter different types of matches that are normally withheld from you. Plus, additional items will open up as you travel the globe in search of new opponents—expect to find some cool soccer-related items such as new shoes and kits.

Of course, there are gameplay mechanics that take advantage of the new soccer setting. Since there aren't any lines in these arenas, you don't have to worry about knocking the ball out of bounds. Instead, you can use the walls to ricochet the ball to a teammate who can then take a shot on goal. Alternatively, the right analog stick functions like the trick stick in *NBA Street*, so all kinds of crazy moves are at your disposal if you feel like freezing the defense that way. The gamebreaker option is still intact, but there really isn't much to it at this point beyond a superkick that doesn't even guarantee an automatic score if the keeper is good enough.

Even so, the game looks like a solid marriage of *Street* style and good, old-fashioned soccer hooliganism. «

Pub. EA Sports Big Dev. EA Sports Canada Release March

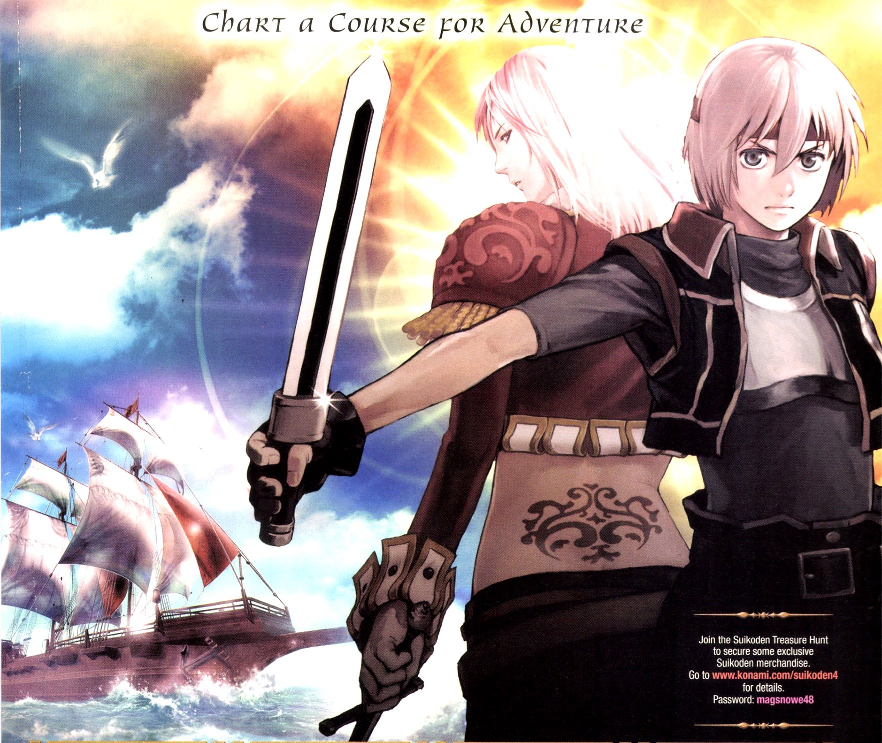


HOMELESS SOCCER CHAMPS

The winning nation in the 2004 Homeless World Cup was none other than Italy. We're sure the team members are happy about winning, but we're not so sure they enjoy the fact that they might have to go back to being homeless after the game is over. Sometimes the world is cruel.

NO REFS

One of the great things about street soccer is that there aren't any refs, so you can feel free to slide tackle all you want. You don't have to worry about being called for offsides either, which is probably a good thing considering these arenas are about a quarter of the size of a regular soccer pitch.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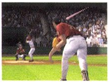
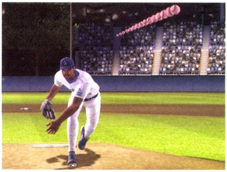
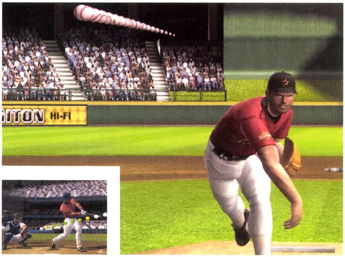
SPRING TRAINING

2005 BASEBALL PREVIEW

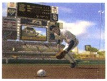
MVP 2005

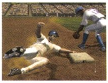


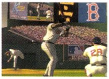


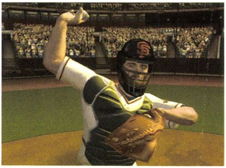


ESPN MLB 2K5









MVP BASEBALL 2005

Own the competition

EA's *MVP Baseball 2005* builds upon the mechanics of last year's game and adds a whole bunch of new gameplay features and modes to the mix. The most notable of these new features are the new minigame modes. This represents a fundamental shift in design for the game, intended to make it appeal more to baseball fans who aren't overly concerned with playing through entire seasons or micromanaging their beloved teams.

There are essentially two different types of minigames—one focuses on batting and the other focuses on pitching. The batting minigame instructs you to hit the ball into specific portions of the field and will award points based on how far you hit the ball. If you hit it into the wrong spot, then you lose points. Along with those rules, you have to worry about objects that are actually on the field, some of which—like ramps—will increase the distance the ball travels. Others—like cardboard cutouts of infielders or vortexes in the middle of the field—will reduce the distance.

As for the pitching minigame, think of it as pitching *Tetris*. No, the blocks don't come down from the top or anything, but you have to hit color-coded blocks that are placed within the strike zone. If you want to get rid of black blocks, you must aim and select the corresponding pitch. Of course, the number of blocks you knock out determines the score you receive. If you perform well in both minigames, then you can unlock classic players and other legends-related material by spending your hard-earned MVP points.

These minigames are pretty fun, but most baseball fanatics will probably be a little more intrigued by the new owner's mode, which includes the ability to build your very own stadium from the ground up—literally. There are several initial adjustments you can make to your stadium, including choosing the location, the appearance of the outfield and the batter's box, the dirt type, and the mow pattern for the grass, just to name a few. Your park will grow in size when you make sound financial decisions that give you enough money to purchase upgrades. Beyond that, you have to keep track of dozens of other facets in this mode to maintain a good team. These include keeping fans happy and making sure that the team chemistry is at a high level. If both of these categories start to trail off, don't expect to be in the World Series anytime soon.

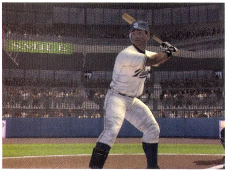
Pub. EA Sports Dev. EA Sports Release March

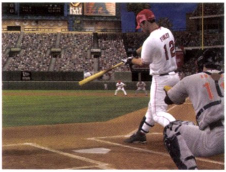
ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K5

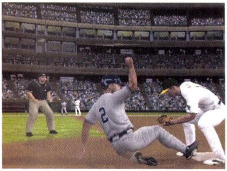
Rebuilding a franchise

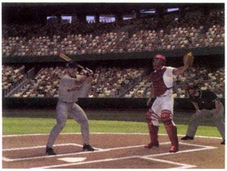
The team at Visual Concepts went back to the drawing board and returned with plenty of new features for *ESPN Major League Baseball 2K5*. The most drastic change is the pitching interface, which now completely borrows the K-Zone pitching-analysis tool used during ESPN's baseball broadcasts. You still have to pick a zone and a specific pitch that you want to throw, but the effort meter found in last year's game has been replaced with horizontal and vertical spots connected to bars that you have to align. The closer together they are, the more accurate your pitch will be. Also, if you select a difficult pitch or plan to put a little more heat on the ball, you'll find it's a tad harder

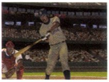
MLB 2006

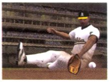


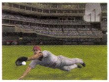


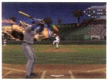












to line them up properly. A successful pitcher will gradually gain more confidence, making it easier to handle tough situations.

There's a new outfielding control scheme called maximum fielding to go along with the new pitching interface. Not unlike in basketball or football games, the right analog stick can now be used to perform different types of catches in the outfield. If a ball shoots by the shortstop, you can quickly flick the right analog stick in the direction of the ball and attempt to make a diving catch. The same control scheme is used for baserunning as well, so you can execute a variety of slides depending on which direction you press on the right analog stick.

The gameplay isn't the only thing that has benefited from some reworking. The ESPN presentation has been improved, giving an even greater feel that you're watching a game broadcast on television, thanks to some new camera angles and additional elements. The franchise mode is as deep as ever with the GM mode, which gives you full control over every aspect of your team. There are also plenty of features to unlock, such as stadiums, and you can view any trophies or special awards you've earned in the Skybox.

Pub. ESPN Videogames Dev. Visual Concepts Release March

MLB 2006

Swinging for the fences

Much like ***MVP,*** this year's version of *MLB* is all about refining the preexisting formula. There aren't any huge changes to the batting interface outside of unique batting animations for key players, like Sammy Sosa, who will go through his routine before taking a pitch. Speaking of pitching, a new accuracy meter has been added to the game. Much as with other pitching meters, you press the button once to start the pitcher's motion and then time it so that the bar in the meter lands in the green area for the most accurate pitch.

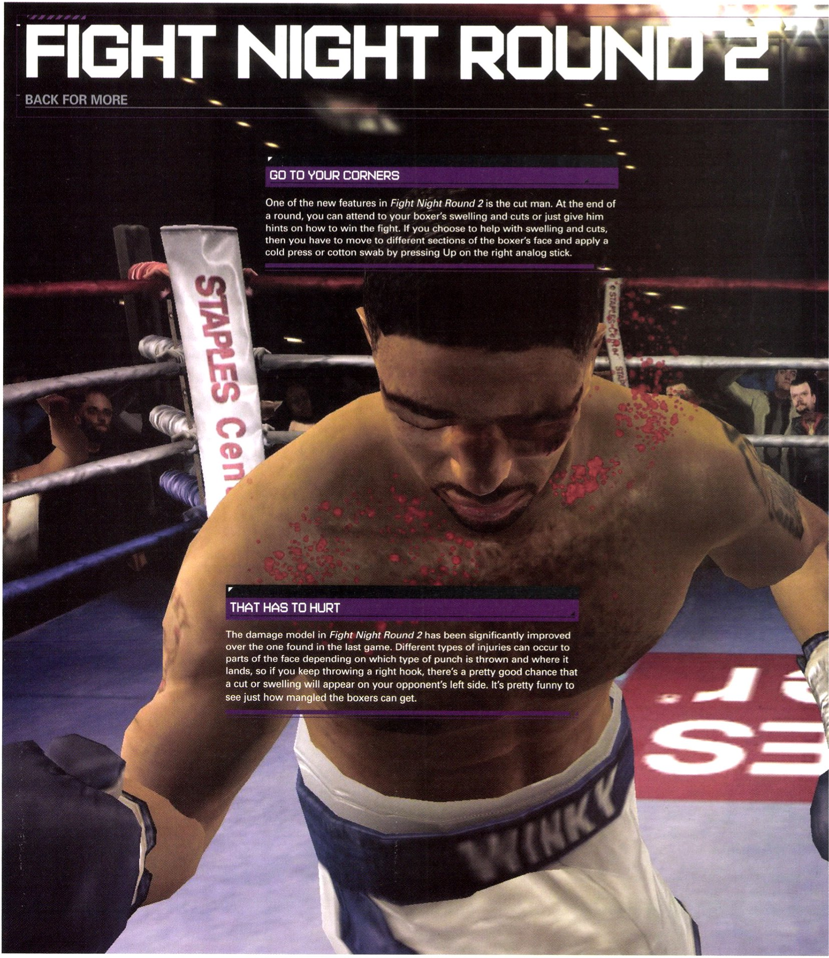
More changes have been made to outfielding. 989 Sports has added some depth to catching fly balls by incorporating an icon that gives a general indication of where the ball is supposed to land. If the player fielding the ball has a high defensive rating, then that icon gives a clearer idea of where the ball is actually going to land, but if his defensive rating is low, then the icon isn't quite as accurate.

As for the rest of the game, most of the time has been spent on streamlining the franchise and career modes. 989 understands that a lot of the complaints about last year's game stemmed from the not-so-user-friendly interface, so all of the options you'll find in these modes are a bit easier to find, read, and understand. The franchise and career modes still give you different perspectives on professional baseball—one focuses on controlling an entire team, while the other puts you in the role of a player trying to make a name for himself in the major leagues. It looks like a solid update so far. «

Pub. Sony CEA Dev. 989 Sports Release March

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2

BACK FOR MORE

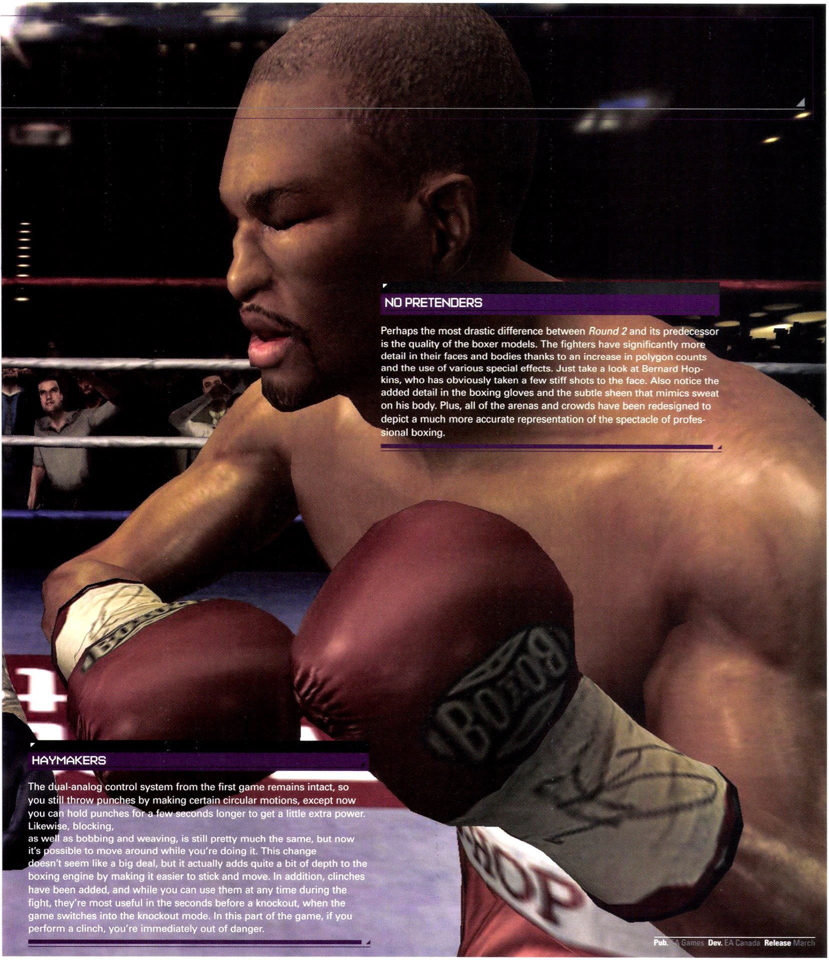


GO TO YOUR CORNERS

One of the new features in *Fight Night Round 2* is the cut man. At the end of a round, you can attend to your boxer's swelling and cuts or just give him hints on how to win the fight. If you choose to help with swelling and cuts, then you have to move to different sections of the boxer's face and apply a cold press or cotton swab by pressing Up on the right analog stick.

THAT HAS TO HURT

The damage model in *Fight Night Round 2* has been significantly improved over the one found in the last game. Different types of injuries can occur to parts of the face depending on which type of punch is thrown and where it lands, so if you keep throwing a right hook, there's a pretty good chance that a cut or swelling will appear on your opponent's left side. It's pretty funny to see just how mangled the boxers can get.



NO PRETENDERS

Perhaps the most drastic difference between *Round 2* and its predecessor is the quality of the boxer models. The fighters have significantly more detail in their faces and bodies thanks to an increase in polygon counts and the use of various special effects. Just take a look at Bernard Hopkins, who has obviously taken a few stiff shots to the face. Also notice the added detail in the boxing gloves and the subtle sheen that mimics sweat on his body. Plus, all of the arenas and crowds have been redesigned to depict a much more accurate representation of the spectacle of professional boxing.

HAYMAKERS

The dual-analog control system from the first game remains intact, so you still throw punches by making certain circular motions, except now you can hold punches for a few seconds longer to get a little extra power. Likewise, blocking, as well as bobbing and weaving, is still pretty much the same, but now it's possible to move around while you're doing it. This change doesn't seem like a big deal, but it actually adds quite a bit of depth to the boxing engine by making it easier to stick and move. In addition, clinches have been added, and while you can use them at any time during the fight, they're most useful in the seconds before a knockout, when the game switches into the knockout mode. In this part of the game, if you perform a clinch, you're immediately out of danger.

Pub. EA Games **Dev.** EA Canada **Release** March

PICK UP THE SLACK

You could hear the sigh of disappointment from over 1 million people when Kazunori Yamauchi said *GT4* wouldn't support online play. Polyphony should thank the homebrew community for correcting this mistake by sending them all boxes of cookies.

GRAN TURISMO 4 ONLINE?

XLINK KAI SOFTWARE BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO PS2 SOFTWARE

Tunneling software isn't an entirely new phenomenon in console gaming. But it hasn't caught on quite as much on the PlayStation 2 as it has on the Xbox—owners of the original *Halo* have been playing online over the past few years thanks to software that allows games that have LAN capabilities to be played over the Internet. That's right, any game that supports the ability to link a couple of PlayStation 2s together for some multiplayer action can theoretically be played over the Internet.

With this in mind, the group of homebrew developers behind the XLink Kai software (www.teamxlink.co.uk) has been working to incorporate online play into PS2 games that didn't originally ship with such a feature. This includes Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo 4*, whose planned online play got stripped at the last minute. Now, to the delight of racing fans in Japan, *Gran Turismo 4* can be played online with up to four players using the Kai network, and best of all, there doesn't seem to be much of a problem with lag. Of course, it may not be as robust as what Polyphony had planned, but it's the only way you can experience *Gran Turismo* online, assuming the North American version also works with the software.

Also, the Kai network isn't restricted to just the PlayStation 2. In fact, PSP games (such as *Ridge Racers*, *Lumines*, and 13 others) can also be played over the Internet in a similar manner by using the PSP's Wi-Fi capabilities to connect to your wireless network. As you can imagine, it's a little easier to find other PSP players using this method than it is to sit on a bus and hope that someone else has an import PSP and also happens to be playing the same game you're playing at that moment. «

JAPANTOWN

DRIVE AWAY IN A LOVELY PS2

ANDREW VESTAL

teaches English in the land of our friends to the East. He does not own a car.

Why do people play videogames? Space precludes a full listing of the reasons, but here's one possible answer: Videogames let you do something you could never do otherwise. In a videogame, you can travel back 60 years and storm the beaches of Normandy with your squad. In a videogame, you can prowl the urban jungle as a corrupt cop, honorable hit man, or anything in between. In a videogame, you can find friends in a strange land and adventure together in search of treasure and glory. In a videogame, you can drive a car.

"So what!" you say. "I drive a car every day." Point taken—but you live in America, with its mandatory driving commutes, expansive 12-lane highways, and infinite parking-lot vistas. American adults drive cars; that's just a fact. Automotive culture in Japan is completely different. Only about half the adults over 16 possess a driver's license, and not everyone with a license owns a car. Why would you want to? In Japan's cities, most homes are a short walk or shorter bike ride from a train station, and the trains arrive every three to five minutes. Many single young Tokyoites pay a small fortune each month to live in a six-tatami-mat apartment—which works out to about 9 feet by 11 feet. With space at such a premium in cities, car owners must prove ownership of a regular parking space, which costs an extra $500-plus a month over already exorbitant rent. By and large, car ownership in Japan is for two groups: the very rich and the very rural.

Gran Turismo 4 was recently released in Japan; the series, with its comprehensive vehicle roster and exotic track locales, has always appealed to die-hard racing fans and car nuts from all around the globe. In Japan, however, there's another audience: adults who have never driven a car and want to know what it's like. When a parking spot costs several hundred dollars each month, the price of a PS2, force-feedback steering wheel, and software seems far less prohibitive. To people who may have never actually driven a real car, the obsessive fidelity of *Gran Turismo* takes on a new level of importance: In some ways (not all, but some), it can stand in for the real thing.

"Not the same, but good enough." Many popular genres serve this purpose in Japan, letting gamers try their hand at an activity that might be difficult in real life. Pet games, like the faddish Tamagotchi, give space-cramped children an "animal" to call their own. Bemani games, like *Guitar Freaks* and *Drummania*, provide the satisfaction of playing a musical instrument at a professional level with a mere fraction of the practice time. The popular *Boku no Natsu Yasumi* series ("My Summer Vacation") lets gamers collect insects, swim in the ocean, and make new friends. It's no substitute for a real vacation, but its charming graphics and relaxed pace make it nearly as soothing as one. And who can forget those infamous "dating" games....

So perhaps a revision to our original reason is in order: People play videogames because they let you do something you probably wouldn't do otherwise. Not just the impossible, but the improbable, too. Players don't care if a game deals with the fantastic or the mundane. They just care if it's fun. «

CAR OWNERSHIP IS FOR TWO GROUPS: THE VERY RICH AND THE VERY RURAL.

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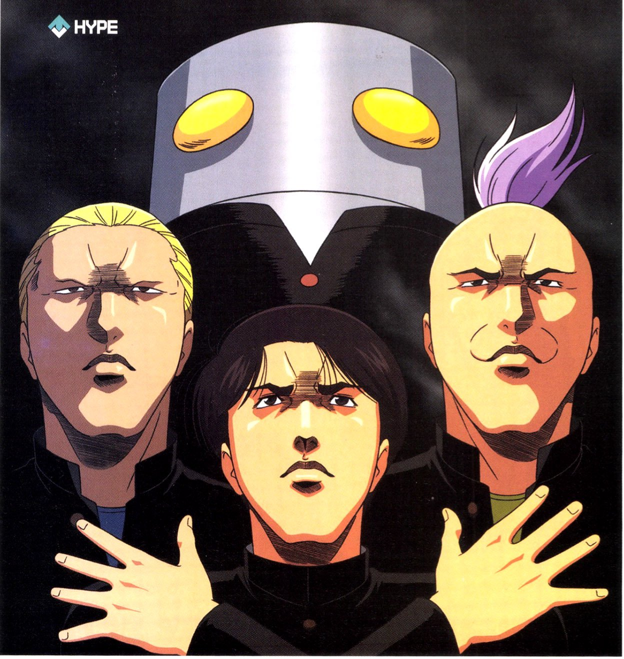

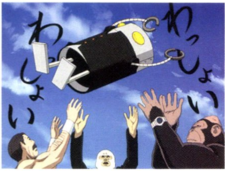
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ANIMANIA

FREDDIE MERCURY—ON A STEEL HORSE HE RIDES

MONKEY VS. ROBOT VS. MERCURY...

It's easier to describe what *Cromartie High School* isn't than what it is. It's not a drama (though it's plenty dramatic), it's not a comedy (though it's side-splittingly funny), it's not sci-fi (though there's a robot and various aliens in the cast), and it's not another high-school-thug-slugfest show (despite featuring a cast almost entirely composed of teenage delinquents). It's absurd, perhaps, in the classical sense, like rhinoceri running through Eugene Ionesco plays, although *Cromartie* skips those in favor of a semisentient gorilla and Freddie Mercury riding a massive horse. Whatever it is, it's worth a purchase when ADV launches the first volumes (of both the comic series and the TV show on DVD) in March. Also watch for ADV's release of the *Five Star Stories* movie in the same month.

MEET THE DEMON KING

One of the guiltiest good times on the market launches April 19, when Geneon's first volume of *Kyou Kara Maoh!* hits shelves. At its best (when it's tearing loose from the shackles of generic fantasy adventure), this is a hilarious parody of the fistful-of-pretty-boys concept, tossing its hapless modern-day hero into the unlikely role of Demon King while a heap of hot-looking male associates compete for his attention and three cute fangirl-avatar maids keep up a running commentary on potential couples. Yes, it is intentionally homoerotic as all get-out (just barely under the surface, anyway), but it is also a laugh and a half at its best moments.

SUPER TECHNO ALIVE

Contrary to the belief of some, Super Techno Arts is not in fact dead, and the saga of *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* will continue on North American DVD. The fourth volume of the surreal heroic action series should be on shelves as you read this, and STA (currently emerging from corporate reorganization) claims the sixth and final disc will hit in June.

SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS

Although Geneon hasn't yet mined the most interesting corners of the massive Toei back catalog (including classic flicks like *Flying Ghost Ship* and classic TV like the martial arts biography *Kick no Oni*), the first fruits of its deal with the Japanese film giant will arrive March 15. The new-school shonen beat-em-up series *Air Master* and the long-running basketball epic *Slam Dunk* both launch with a pair of volumes on that date. *Air Master* is a cut above the genre average, and the opening moments of *Slam Dunk* are hilarious (as its massive, gangling hero first comes to grips with the sport), so check them out.

THE MOST TOYS

Kicking off a largely less-than-exciting spring release lineup (*Bakuretsu Tenshi* and *Gunslinger Girl* in May, *Baki the Grappler* in June, and more *Dragon Ball Z* scattered all around), FUNimation has a genuine gem slated to launch this April. *Kodomo no Omocha*, or *Child's Toy* (it'll be released under the popular abbreviated title *Kodocha*), features hyperactive child star Sana and her never-ending quest to conquer kids' TV, deal with her half-mad best-selling author of a mother, and shill as many musical toys as possible with frantic freestyle rap sessions. A must-watch for any and all ages. « Dave Smith

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Mystery Word Grid

	H				___
		E			___
P	I	N	C	H	W
	R				___
S					___

MYSTERY WORD

WORD LIST and LETTER CODE chart

PINCH .....W	PRESS.......K	BLAST ......A	WRECK .....D
BREAK ......Z	PUNCH .....S	SPRAY C	TURBO......V
STOMP .....T	STAND......R	PRESS ....E	DREAM....O
CRUSH.......I	SCORE .....H	SLANT L	CHASE......P

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Verifiable retail value of the prize packages as follows: Media Rig Contest package $7,012.00 core components shown, bonus options $3,449.00, cash options $1,250.00. Computer Contest package $2,500.00 for computer, bonus options $2,337.00, cash options $1,250.00. Video Game Contest $700.00 for systems shown, $3,549.00 bonus options, $1,250.00 cash options.

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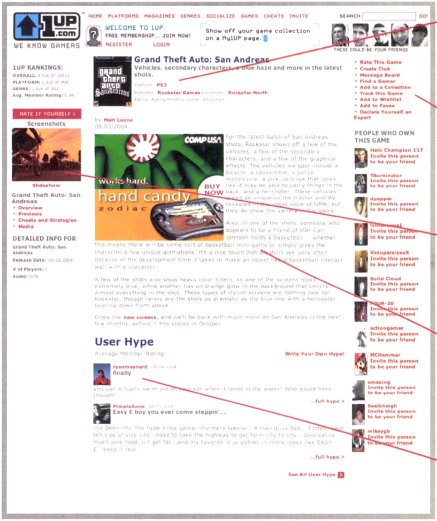

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Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
- Overview
- Previews
- Cheats and Strategies
- Media

DETAILED INFO FOR
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
Release Date: 10/19/2004
# of Players: 1
Audio: DTS

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Vehicles, secondary characters, a blue haze and more in the latest shots.

Platform: **PS2**
Publisher: **Rockstar Games** Developer: **Rockstar North**
Rating: Rating Pending Genre: Adventure

by **Matt Leone**
08/03/2004

For the latest batch of San Andreas shots, Rockstar shows off a few of the vehicles, a few of the secondary characters, and a few of the graphical effects. The vehicles we spot include a bicycle, a convertible, a police motorcycle, a pick-up truck that looks like it may be able to carry things in the back, and a helicopter. These vehicles aren't as unique as the tractor and RV revealed in the latest issue of GMR, but they do show the variety in the game.

Also, in one of the shots, someone who appears to be a friend of star Carl Johnson holds a basketball -- whether this means there will be some sort of basketball mini-game or simply gives the character a few unique animations, it's a nice touch that we don't see very often because of the development time it takes to make an object like a basketball interact well with a character.

A few of the shots also show heavy color filters, so one of the screens looks extremely blue, while another has an orange glow in the background that covers almost everything in the shot. These types of stylish screens are nothing new for Rockstar, though rarely are the shots as dramatic as the blue one with a helicopter bearing down from above.

Enjoy the **new screens**, and we'll be back with much more on San Andreas in the next few months, before it hits stores in October.

User Hype

Average Member Rating:

Write Your Own Hype!

ryanmaynard (08/04/2004)
finally

you can actually swim out of your car when it lands in the water! Who would have thought.......

...full hype >

PimpleJuice (08/15/2004)
Easy E boy you ever come steppin'...

i've been into this hype since game informers special...4 man drive bys...3 citys, each teh size of vice city...have to take the highway to get form city to city...dont eat to much junk food, u'll get fat...and my favorite is ur patner in crime looks like EASY E...keep it real.....

...full hype >

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PEOPLE WHO OWN THIS GAME

Halo Champion 117
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TBurninator
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dpepper
Invite this person to be your friend

[illegible]
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XxsupersizexX
Invite this person to be your friend

Solid Cloud
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FOUR-20
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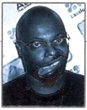

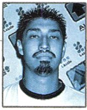

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REVIEWS

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CHAMPIONS

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RATING KEY

Octagons. Stomps. Ocs. Blargs. Call our rating symbols what you will—just know that any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well…at least they're fun to rip apart.

[●●●●●]

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AREA 51

DO YOU WANT TO BELIEVE?

Area 51 is one of the last great mysteries in America. Its scrupulously defended borders come complete with signs warning "Use of deadly force authorized." A single step in the wrong direction can be answered with swift—and entirely legal—execution. The desert air positively reeks of Cold War paranoia: Unmarked patrol vehicles circle endlessly, mysterious "Janet" planes ferry scientists in and out, and strange code phrases and encrypted transmissions fill little-used radio frequencies. The U.S. government refers to the base in only the most vague and oblique manner—while quietly seizing surrounding land to increase Area 51's halo of mystery.

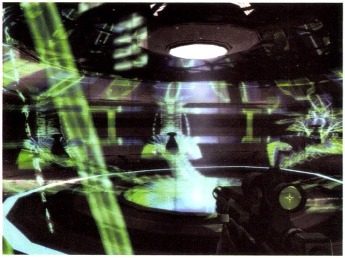
It's the perfect setting for a videogame.

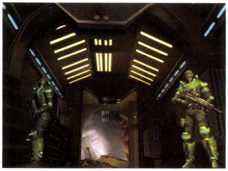
The only trouble is, with so many fantastic stories permeating the Area 51 mythos, how do you choose which ones to weave into your game? Midway's answer: don't. Just throw them all in there. Alien autopsies, spontaneous human combustion, crop circles, the Illuminati, a faked lunar landing, reverse-engineered alien technology, universal government surveillance, intentional epidemics of mind-controlling diseases—every crackpot theory that ever crossed the mind of a paranoid conspiracy theorist has made its way from those bookshelves of densely handwritten journals and into *Area 51* in some form.

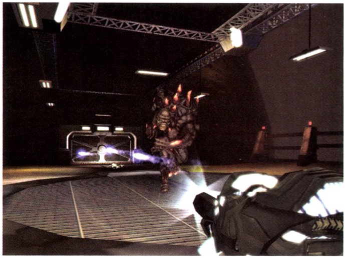
This is, in one sense, immensely entertaining. It's obvious that the designers of the game don't take this stuff too seriously (well, either that or they need some *serious* help), and this adds some levity to the story. The problem is, by trying to hook so many of these disparate theories together, Midway has created a story that's just this side of incomprehensible. (To be fair, only Roswell, the Illuminati, and germ warfare play really major roles—but believe me, that makes it tough enough to follow.) This problem is compounded in one pivotal segment by two types of characters—the Viktor clones and the Mr. White clones—who are on opposite sides and yet look virtually identical. Please, folks, I was having a hard enough time as it was!

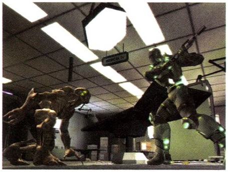
All this hurts the story, and that's a shame, because *Area 51* takes some obvious influences from *Half-Life*, the great storytelling first-person shooter of our time. You've got your hapless hazmat hero, your alien menace, your frequent scripted segments...I was half expecting to pick up a crowbar at some point. But seriously, with a deeper, more focused story, *Area 51* could have become a classic in its own right. As it is, it's not quite there.

Let me be clear, though: "Not quite there" is still pretty damn good. This is due in large part to the jaw-dropping technology that drives this









game. I have no idea how the designers managed to trot out every graphical trick in the book and still keep the game running at a deliciously smooth framerate, but the result is an extremely fast-paced shooter that also manages to look nothing short of gorgeous.

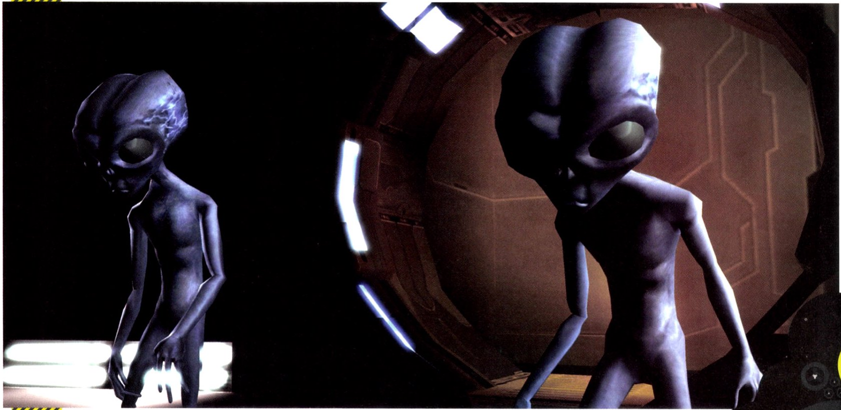
Even more impressive than the technical prowess is the wonderfully varied, imaginative graphical design. As you move through the game, you pass through a distinct progression of environmental styles, from the stark utilitarianism of the upper levels, to a more organic system of tunnels and caverns, to the final stages, which are quite literally alien. These final stages really cemented in my mind the skill of *Area 51*'s design team.

Most alien architecture in sci-fi games falls into one of three categories: the retro-futuristic, chrome-and-blinking-lights model; the depressingly stark yet strangely familiar model; or the HR Giger, "I've seen *Aliens* too many times" model. This is something completely different. These areas feel like they were designed not by someone making a conscious effort to avoid human motifs, but by someone who'd never actually been to Earth. That's quite a feat (well, assuming the levels weren't *actually* designed by aliens—which would, I suppose, be a feat of another kind). It made me wish the game had devoted more time to the alien segments and a little less to the more military-looking areas.

I can't complain too much, though, because everything has its place: As you progress through the different environments, the feel of the game progresses accordingly. It's fairly subtle, but by the time you reach the end, the early segments start to feel like a different game. I'll explain. See, you start the game as Ethan Cole, a member of a hazardous-materials cleanup crew sent in to contain an as-yet-unidentified outbreak in Area 51. You're very quickly equipped with some pretty serious firepower (a weak point in the story, if you ask me; why would a hazmat grunt have the slightest idea how to use a machine gun?) and sent in with a constantly shifting roster of squadmates.

BY THE TIME YOU REACH THE END, IT FEELS LIKE A DIFFERENT GAME.

Remember the scene in *Aliens* when the soldiers are instructed not to discharge their weapons, but Vasquez freaks out and starts firing wildly, prompting everyone to do the same? The first third or so of the game



KEEPER OF SECRETS

AREA 51'S CREATIVE DIRECTOR LEAKS SENSITIVE INFORMATION

OPM How did the idea to do this radical update of a light-gun shooter come about?

JAMES STIEFELMAIER I must confess that as a kid I dropped more quarters on this shooter than any other light-gun game. Midway has an excellent back catalog, and it made sense to recapture the spirit of the light-gun game and translate it into a more modern medium. I think gamers appreciate the updating of a classic if [it's] done well and with respect. Even today, I see kids playing *Area 51* in a local pizza shop, so I feel an obligation to do it right.

OPM Does basing a new game on an old franchise make development easier or harder?

JS I think it depends on how strictly you must follow the franchise. I think it could be a burden if you had to completely stay true to the original story or characters. But an old franchise that's being revitalized can help you greatly; it is like the old game wants to whisper its secrets to you, helping you set a new direction while preserving its old glory.

Take *Robotron*—it has an excellent play pattern, but the 2D '80s visuals don't suggest much. However, it could be an engaging game; it is about rescuing the last human family from the clutches of an unrelenting robotic threat. If I can find a meaningful way to use two analog sticks in a 3D world, I believe the game would sell. I want to attack this game next.

OPM The PS2 seems to be experiencing a major resurgence of first-person shooters. Any idea why that is?

JS I think FPSes are some of the most accessible games to play. Due to the point of view, I believe they allow for greater suspension of disbelief as you *are* the in-game character, those are *your* hands with *your* weapon. They are also great for giving the player a cathartic experience, helping to reduce stress by shooting enemies and blowing up things. Additionally, they usually have a multiplayer component so they are a good value; you get a great single-player experience and endless play online.

OPM Your portrayal of alien technology in this new *Area 51* is extremely, well, alien—how did you come up with all the unusual designs for the alien base?

JS The credit must go to our art director, Pete Franco, and our art staff, especially Michael McClelland and Mike Fong. They set several priorities in order to create a unique alien theme.

First, since human architecture is largely made up of right angles and flat surfaces, we tried to make the alien art style as organic and curvy as we could.

Second, we really wanted to show the aliens using energy-based technology, something beyond the metal and concrete of the military environments. The eerie glows and bright lights really give the alien environments an ethereal quality.

Third, we knew we wanted a sense of depth in every part of the environment. So we took advantage of gaps between panels, see-through floors, and exposed ceilings and added additional geometry. We didn't want the player to ever see a flat wall with just a texture.

And finally, the textures were kept simple to emphasize that this was an artificial environment. There wouldn't be any peeling paint or concrete in these areas—alien material technology is just too advanced.

> "THE BASE IS REAL, YET STILL SUCH A COMPLETE MYSTERY."

OPM What do you, personally, think happened—or is happening—at the real Area 51?

JS The government tested a bunch of spy planes there, developed the F-117 stealth fighter, and I think Area 51 is a launching point for the Aurora hypersonic spy plane.

I think the majority of the base is made of the mundane "secrets" we already know of. However, where better to hide a secret than within another secret? I truly believe there is darker side to Area 51, a part of the base that very few of the workers there get to see. This is where "they" are still reverse-engineering alien technology from the crash in 1947 at Roswell, New Mexico.

OPM What is it about Area 51 that's so fascinating to people?

JS I think it's the possibilities of the unknown. The base is real yet still such a complete mystery. For people with imagination, the possibilities are endless.

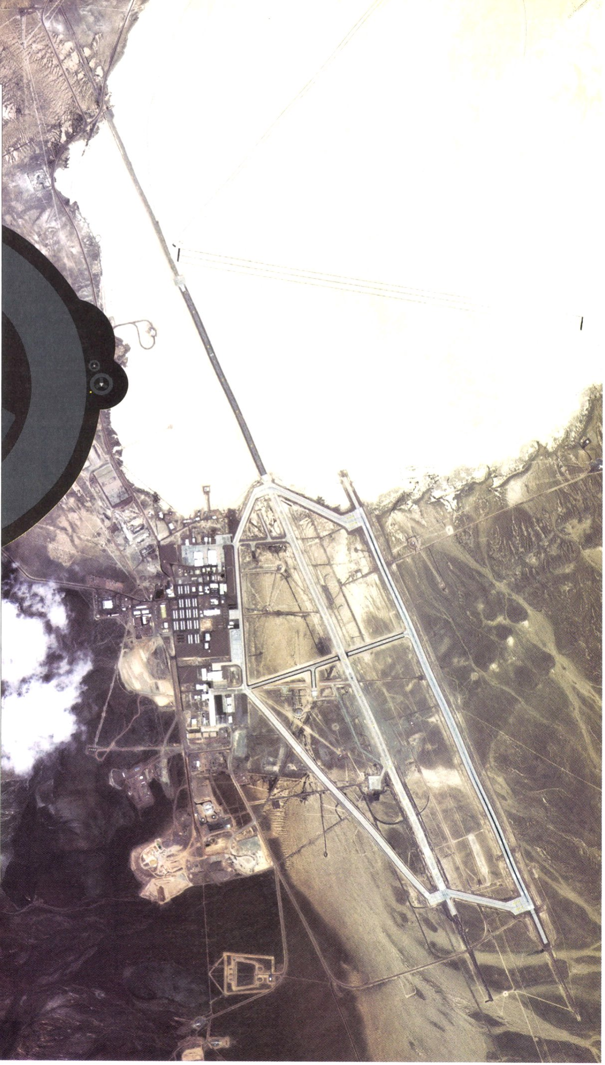
AREA 51: THE REAL STORY

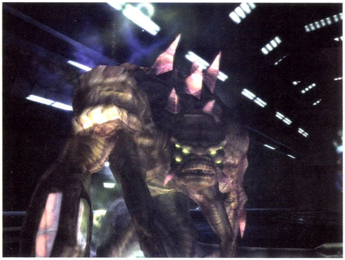
LOOKING FOR LITTLE GREEN MEN? KEEP LOOKING

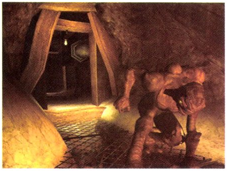
So, what exactly is Area 51? You may be surprised to learn that it has very little to do with aliens. The Air Force base at Groom Lake, Nevada (variously called Dreamland, Paradise Ranch, Watertown Strip, and many other names) was designated as Area 51 only on military survey maps of the '50s and '60s. Groom Lake has served as a testing area for top-secret flight projects since the 1950s. These "black" projects include the U-2 spy plane, the SR-71 "Blackbird," and the B-2 stealth bomber. It's unclear whether the military is still using the site for secret testing; a late-'90s *Popular Mechanics* article concluded that due to the public interest in Groom Lake, the Air Force's primary test facility had relocated to White Sands, Utah. However, the frequent pilgrims to the desert around Area 51 continue to report strange lights and other airborne phenomena, so the base may still be in service.

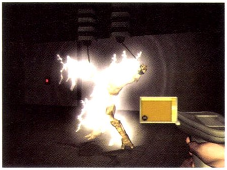
With all this in mind, you may be wondering why Area 51 ever got a reputation for housing aliens and their spacecraft—most notoriously, the remains of the ship that allegedly crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947. This perception can be traced almost exclusively to a man named Robert Lazar, who in 1989 claimed that, while working at an Area 51 facility, it was his responsibility to reverse-engineer captured alien spacecraft. Until Lazar's publicity campaign, alien enthusiasts tended to focus on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. Wright-Patterson is the home of the infamous Hangar 18, which is where the wreckage of whatever it was that crashed at Roswell is widely reported to have ended up. Once Lazar's story started circulating in UFO fan circles, though, it was concluded that the remains had been transported to Area 51. Why the government would transport top-secret technology across the country—twice—is anyone's guess.

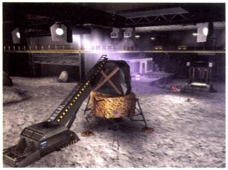
It's easy to see why Groom Lake has retained such an air of mystery, however. As a testing area for advanced military projects, Groom Lake is, by necessity, extremely well guarded. Sightseers are not permitted within viewing distance of the base, and its defenders are authorized to use deadly force on trespassers. The Air Force has even gone so far as to buy up the mountain ranges surrounding Groom Lake in order to make it impossible for civilians to have a direct line of sight to the base. Clearly the government is hiding something, you say! Well, *yeah*. They're hiding military secrets from potential enemies. Could they also be hiding alien technology, though? It would certainly be as good a place as any. But with all the Area 51 hoopla in the last 15 years, it's supremely unlikely that a cover-up of that magnitude could survive. In the end, you'll just have to decide for yourself whether you want to believe.



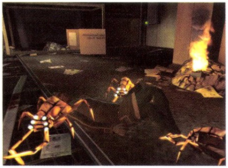


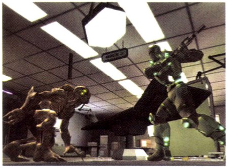


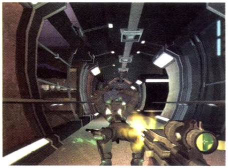




THETA MAX
The Theta (above) is a particularly nasty beastie whipped up by the Greys in a fit of maniacal mad-scientism. You'll run into him (and his siblings, presumably) a few times over the course of the game—and wish you hadn't, every time.







consists of variations on that theme: tough-talking roughnecks completely losing their heads (literally, in one memorable case) as hordes of monsters leap through every available portal. It's very well done; even the voice acting is mostly exceptional. (And let me take a moment to say that any game designers who aspire to have their characters lip-synch their lines really need to spend some time with *Area 51* to see how it's done.)

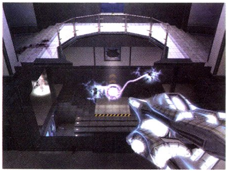
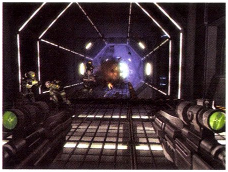
All too soon, though, you're on your own, and the game starts to feel more like survival-horror. You're hunting down keys, praying for health-ups, and jumping every so often as some hitherto unseen creature leaps out at you from the shadows. The pacing is still brisk, to be sure, but it's a little less insane than in the earlier levels.

As the game draws to a close, the tone shifts once again, reintroducing some serious gunplay—albeit at a much more deliberate pace—while maintaining a theme of exploration and the occasional simple puzzle. I like this; it's nice to play a game that isn't just a shooting gallery with interchangeable texture palettes.

I just wish it could have gone on longer. I'd roughly estimate my completion time at around 10 to 15 hours; I'd gladly have taken double that. More time would have also meant more opportunity to follow any of the myriad story threads, which would have been a very good thing indeed. It's clear that a great deal of development time went into tweaking the game visually and technologically; I wouldn't have minded the game looking a *little* less sparkly if it meant another five or 10 hours of play. But I won't belabor the point.

I also wouldn't have minded if David Duchovny and Marilyn Manson had been dropped in favor of lesser-known (and undoubtedly *much* less expensive) voice talent. Duchovny's voiceovers add a certain *X-Files* nostalgia, to be sure, but his deadpan-to-the-point-of-catatonia tone makes him better at detached irony than he is at drama; far too often you can almost hear him rolling his eyes over the occasionally melodramatic monologues. Manson, on the other hand, is obviously reveling in his role as the sadistic alien Edgar, but even with his voice this heavily processed, he still sounds like that skinny Goth kid who used to spend study hall

DUCHOVNY'S VOICEOVERS ADD A CERTAIN *X-FILES* NOSTALGIA.

MULTIPLAYER MADNESS

A WHIRLWIND TOUR THROUGH AREA 51'S ONLINE MODES

The first thing you'll notice about *Area 51*'s online play is that it's fast. Damn fast. Due to some cunning memory management, rendering the levels themselves uses up very little processing power—meaning your PS2 is free to devote all kinds of resources to keeping the many graphical effects buzzing and the framerate humming along at an almost unbelievably steady 30 frames per second.

The second thing you'll notice is that you're dead. Do not be alarmed; this will happen early, and it will happen often. The speed, the 16-player capacity, and the relatively small levels will all conspire to keep your death toll in the double digits for most games. This frenetic pacing will shock players of the PS2's most popular online shooters, most especially the comparatively soporific *SOCOM*. If you're looking for a thoughtful, methodical, tactical shooter, you're going to want to look elsewhere.

That aside, *Area 51*'s online mode is extremely solid, with a few innovations that may revolutionize online shooters if the game becomes popular enough. The first and most interesting is the introduction of level "scaling." What this means is that if you set up a match with only four players, you'll be playing in a relatively small space. But as more players join, previously locked doors will unlock, increasing the usable size of the level to accommodate the added players. (Interestingly, in the 16-player matches I participated in with the designers at Midway's Austin studios, there were still some doors that appeared locked. This led me to speculate that perhaps a server-hosted game—on PS2, *Area 51* uses GameSpy for hosting—could accommodate more than 16 players. Midway refused to comment, which sounds like a "yes" to me.)

This on-the-fly scaling is a fantastic idea, and definitely helps keep the pace of the game in the pulse-pounding area. The game modes are also designed for fast action. There's deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag, and "capture and hold," in which teams are awarded points based on how much of the map they control. These are all plenty entertaining, but the most intriguing mode is "infection." A 16-player infection game starts with 15 humans and one mutant; the mutant is awarded 15 points for each human he kills, while a human gets only one point for killing the lone mutant.

Here's where it gets interesting: The mutant can infect the humans, effectively recruiting teammates from the other side; the scoring now changes to reflect the ratio: Mutants now get 14 points for each human killed; humans get two points for each mutant. This continues until the entire human team is mutated. Unfortunately, there is a possibility infection may not make it into the final game; as of this writing Midway is still balancing the mode, and if it proves impossible to properly balance it before the game is due, they may hold it for the inevitable sequel.

Even without infection, though, online play is fantastic: quick, fast, and simple to get into due to the streamlined interface, with an easy-to-use buddy list and feedback feature. It seems like developers are finally getting the hang of this whole online thing—and it's about time.

drawing pentagrams on the back of his notebook and writing really horrible poetry.

But like I said, what *Area 51* may lack in quantity it mostly makes up for in quality. Not to mention density—the game is absolutely oozing with conspiracy in-jokes. I don't want to give them away and spoil it for you, but fire up this month's demo and take a close look around at some of the signs and displays for an idea of what to expect in the final game. You'll also find some really nice, really subtle details that bring the game alive. As just one example, late in the game you'll be walking by rooms full of aliens—all of whom will turn their heads to track your progress, almost daring you to try something. It's neat—a little creepy, but neat.

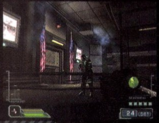
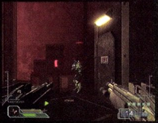
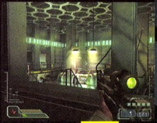
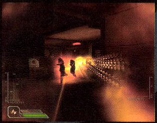
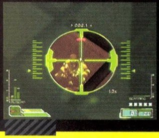
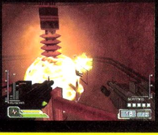
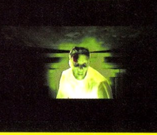
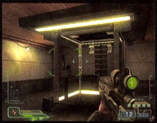
And all this single-player goodness is just part of the story; *Area 51* also features over a dozen multiplayer maps and four modes of play, with up to 16 players going head-to-head in one of the fastest and astonishingly lag-free FPS experiences I've seen on a console. (Check out the sidebar above for more on that.)

All in all, *Area 51* is a really impressive package. It's got its share of flaws, sure, but it's a fine specimen of FPS competence in spite of itself. Besides, it's the closest you'll ever come to setting foot inside the real Area 51—and it's a lot less likely to get you shot. « *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT While technologically astounding and generally satisfying in terms of gameplay, *Area 51* could have used a deeper, clearer story and another five to 10 hours of play time.

Pub. Midway **Dev.** Midway Studios Austin **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●●○]

WE PLAY IT WITH YOU

STEP-BY-STEP THROUGH THIS MONTH'S DEMO

To help you get the most out of our *Area 51* demo, we've included the following walkthrough, made with assistance from James Stiefelmaier, creative director of *Area 51*.

The demo starts in Echelon IV of the facility. You're in a room with no enemies right now, so take some time to see the sights. Pay attention to the lighting: The swinging fluorescent light, in particular, shows off the lighting engine nicely. Next, head over to the door marked "Press Censorship and Disinformation." There are some shiny metal pipes to the left of the door that illustrate the game's scaling level of detail nicely: Walk right up to them and they actually gain more detail instead of losing it, like in most games. Also note the subtle shiny effect on the metal floor. Finally, on the subject of technology, walk up to one of the flags and fire a couple rounds through it—you can actually see through the holes. It's a little thing, but you've never seen it in a PS2 game before.

Now, let's get going for real. Head behind the desk and flip the door access switch. The door to your left will open, letting two black ops (what Stiefelmaier describes as "cloned human/alien DNA-based hybrids") into the room. [1] Now's a good time to check out the different weapons. On the default weapon, R1 fires and R2 zooms in a bit, but switch to the shotgun (△ and ◎ rotate through all the weapons) and R2 unleashes both barrels at once. [2] (You can also try lobbing a grenade by hitting ▢.) Take these guys out and move cautiously into the next area.

"If you remain unseen," says Stiefelmaier, "you can eavesdrop on a fun conversation between a Mr. White clone [a member of the Illuminati] and a black op. [3] The Mr. White clone is working on some interesting alien technology." That's meant to be a hint, people. Head on into the room and check out what Mr. White's working on. You may have noticed that a group of black ops have busted in on your little party. Why not try out your new weapon? (Hint: R2 in this case engages a laser sight, but it also slowly depletes the BBG's ammo.)

The door on the other side of the room leads to some health-ups, so go there first to tend to your wounds before going through the door on the left, which leads to the next section of the game. Ready? "The majority of the gameplay occurs in an immense antenna shaft," says Stiefelmaier. "In the center of the shaft is an elevator loaded with black ops. The top of the elevator seems to be unprotected, and you have some nifty guns...."

Here you'll need to work your way down to the bottom of the shaft, and you'll be running into more black ops on the way. By this time, you may be running low on health, so it's time to try out some mutant powers. Hit Up on the D-pad and you'll transform into a mutant. Now you can hit R3 to perform a melee attack, but what we're really interested in at this point is your mutant parasite power. Hit R1 to send out a swarm of parasites at your enemies; they'll draw life from the bad guys and return it to you. [4] Ah, instant health!

Continue down through the structure. "Don't forget you can shoot through the metal-grate flooring!" says Stiefelmaier. This is a good place to try out your sniper rifle: Here R2 rotates between zoom levels. [5] As with most modern shooters, head shots do more damage than body shots.

Now, follow the green arrow to the communications array at the bottom of the antenna shaft. When you try to engage it, you'll discover that there's some massive interference, so you'll need to head back out and up to take out the source of the static. As you leave the room, though, you'll encounter some new enemies. "This is the first appearance of our red ops," says Stiefelmaier, "which are more powerful versions of black ops who can cloak themselves. Try mutating to see the cloaked red ops; they will glow brightly amid the metal structures."

Climb back up to the top of the shaft, taking out the jamming devices that are zapping the huge antenna array. [6] At the top, you'll need to flip a switch to drop down a ladder giving you access to the maintenance area and the final jamming device. Zap it and head down once more. Once you successfully communicate with your commander, he'll unlock a door at the very bottom of the shaft. Head down and out, and you'll hear Marilyn Manson, as the alien Edgar, give you instructions on how to see the cloaked red ops—which we already did. [7] Moving on.

You enter a cavern that's positively swarming with cloaked red ops. Just keep walking and shooting, shooting and walking. You're almost there—just climb into the lift at the end of the tunnel and head on up. [8] We won't tell you what's at the top of the lift, but we will suggest you immediately walk forward in order to get the full comic effect. «

AREA 51 VITAL LINKS

Want to learn more about Area 51? Check out these fascinating sites.

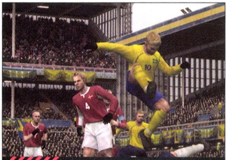
aliensonearth.com
In spite of the name, this is a surprisingly even-handed site about Area 51 and the UFO mythos.

dreamlandresort.com
An extensive informational site about Area 51, complete with pictures, maps, and instructions on how to get there (well, as close as you can get anyway).

abovetopsecret.com/pages/area51.html
A well-written site with lots of pictures and maps, and a scientific discussion on the nature of Area 51 UFO sightings.

crystalinks.com/area51.html A simply designed site with some solid information and some high-quality satellite photos of Area 51.

area51zone.com
A fantastic collection of Area 51–related pictures, from satellite shots to photos and mock-ups of aircraft tested (or thought to have been tested) at Area 51.



WINNING ELEVEN 8

TWEAKED YET AGAIN

As with so many annually updated sports games, *Winning Eleven 8* is all about tweaks and minor changes rather than huge innovations. This isn't such a bad thing, but I know that many of you get annoyed when a sports game is superficially almost identical to its predecessor. *Eleven 8* is something for the real hardcore fans. The rest of you, stick with the latest *FIFA*.

Let's start with the slightly negative stuff. First, for whatever reason, the wonderful, beautiful, sublime volleying system from the last game is gone. Where? I have no idea. Presumably the fun police confiscated it. Its absence is a painful kick to the shins of show-offs everywhere. Second, it seems much harder to score now, which is either good or bad depending on how many hundreds of hours you expect to log. Casual fans will be frustrated, but those of you who refer to the sport by its correct name of "football" and anyone of either British or Italian descent will love it.

OK, so what's better? Well, the obvious stuff is that there are now some real players featured. It's not as comprehensive as *FIFA*, but then, EA is snaffling up the licenses to everything these days and spoiling all the fun. *WE8* has 136 "real" clubs from the Spanish, Italian, and Dutch leagues as well as 57 national teams, and all lord-knows-how-many-players-that-is look remarkably realistic. This is a big step forward, and based on current progress, I think we can expect *Winning Eleven 10* or *11* to be snapping at *FIFA*'s heels in this department.

Next, there's my favorite tweak, the new passing system. The last game had a bit of a hoof-it-and-hope-for-the-best quality about passing into space, and you now have much more control. Holding down the X button longer will perform a longer autopass, and the stats of the different players affect how they interact with the ball in a more obvious way. The game's remarkably satisfying...but is it better than *FIFA 2005*? For American fans, not quite. « *John Davison*

WHY HALF A POINT LESS THAN LAST YEAR?
Because Konami took some good stuff out and didn't add enough good stuff back in.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Konami **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

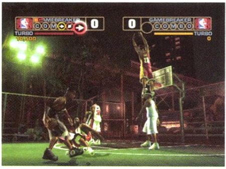
RATING [●●●●◐]

COURT CREATOR

COURT CREATOR

GAMEBREAKER
COMBO
-1
TURBO
1,000
+4 +3 +2
+2
COMBO
TURBO
47,250
P1

GAMEBREAKER
COMBO
0
TURBO
4,000
3
GAMEBREAKER
COMBO
TURBO
17,500
Top Spin
3,000



NBA STREET V3

THE KING HAS RETURNED

Every time I set the controller down after completing an extended *NBA Street V3* session, I couldn't help but pick it right back up again because of how incredibly well the reward system works. Yes, other games have stuff you can unlock, whether it's extra clothing or modes, but *NBA Street V3* integrates it all so well and has such a high level of polish that you'll find yourself drawn into it as if it were some epic RPG.

OK, maybe that's overstating it a bit, but the customization elements are still a ridiculously addictive aspect of the game. It starts with your own character, who you can upgrade by winning games, and the cool thing is that you can have him or her specialize in certain areas, so you can develop a shooter instead of a dunker if you want to balance out your team. There are also clothes and a variety of accessories you can unlock, including unique shoes. But what pushes you even more to continually play the game is the court customization. From the buildings and the advertisements to the type of net and paint, *V3* lets you change nearly every aspect of your court, and there's nothing quite like beating an opponent on a court you built. The fact that the main street challenge mode is so smoothly designed, offering a number of different types of challenges at any single time, only makes the game that much more enjoyable.

Unfortunately, you can't simply bring your single-player created character and court into the online mode. You actually have to start from scratch, so some may find it annoying to switch back and forth or attempt to devote an equal amount of time to both—you might even consider this decision a cheap way of extending play time. Either way, though, the sense of accomplishment and progression is still definitely there, and that's what counts. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

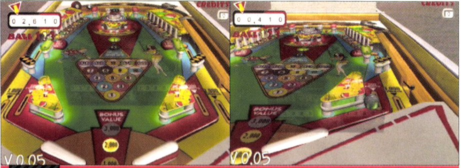
BREAKING THE GAME

The new gamebreaker lets you perform custom dunks by tapping various directions on the right analog stick. This control method is also used for the new dunk contest, which is one of many different game types, but if your player doesn't have very high dunk skills, don't expect anything spectacular.

BALLERS Great single-player mode with plenty of game types, excellent customization features, fun dunk contest.
POSERS Can't bring single-player characters or courts into online mode; defense can be weak at times.

Pub. EA Sports Big **Dev.** EA Sports Big **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]



PINBALL HALL OF FAME

NO QUARTERS ASKED, NONE GIVEN

As game consoles have euthanized and supplanted the coin-op arcades of yore, so have the coin-op arcades of yore stubbornly weaseled and wormed themselves into the homes of gamers, courtesy of several classic arcade collections and now *Pinball Hall of Fame*.

Judging from its "history of pinball" focus, it would seem the good folks at Crave are targeting old fogies desperately trying to establish the slimmest amount of gaming cred with their kids, hijacking their brats' PS2s to stroll down memory lane with such classic tables as *Genie*, *Big Shot*, and *Black Hole*. It is interesting—marginally—to play these tables and see how the design theories have changed over the years, from early tables like *Central Park*, on which merely keeping the ball in play is insanely challenging, to more modern amusements that let you keep your ball while issuing increasingly baroque challenges in order to get a high score.

But after that brief spasm of historical insight, the charm rapidly wears off, mostly due to clumsy programming. There are a variety of view options; however, all but the widest view makes lining up shots just about impossible. If you fail to score a free game, *Hall of Fame* backs right out of the play screen and you've got to endure a couple of menus and loads to play again.

Odds are you'll like only a couple of the tables, at best, and they'll get old fast. You'd be better off taking two rolls of quarters to a real arcade and indulging in some real-world pinball. Now that's a good time. « *Robert Coffey*

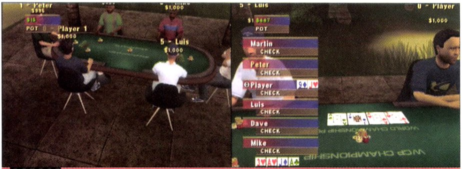
VERDICT It's the only way to play these classics, but sloppy presentation makes it tough to do so.

Pub. Crave **Dev.** FarSight Studios **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [○◐●●●]

PINBALL WIZARD NEEDS FOOD

Despite the presence of the www.pinball-museum.org URL on the *Pinball Hall of Fame* box, there is no real pinball museum—just some guy raising money to build one. The site's worth a visit for the hand-lettered front page alone, but we have to ask: How'd that get on the game box?



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POKER

KNOW WHEN TO RUN

The game is Texas Hold 'Em. You're holding a pair of kings and the flop comes K-K-2. The turn is a 7. You now have the absolute nuts—your hand cannot be beaten. What do you do?

If you're a casual player, you might go all in. If you're a pro, you might make a pot-sized bet, hoping to fool your opponents into thinking you're trying to buy the pot. But if you're a computer-controlled opponent in *World Championship Poker*—on Professional difficulty—you'll check the hand all the way down.

For those new to the game, I'll explain: Checking this hand down—that is, not betting at all—is the next-to-worst thing you could possibly do (the worst being folding). Picture a game of *Madden* in which the computer-controlled receiver, after catching the ball, repeatedly runs toward his opponent's end zone.

That's just one complaint about a wholly disappointing game. Why can't you have more than six players at a table? Why can't you choose to show your cards when the table's folded around to you? And with 12 different games, where is the currently white-hot Omaha 8 or Better?

The game does try to redeem itself with EyeToy support for online play, which is a neat idea that's pulled off surprisingly well. But with the kind of players I've come across online, you're likely to tire of the online experience quickly.

Newcomers might find *World Championship Poker* entertaining, but they'll also probably learn a number of bad habits that will ensure losses if they ever play for real. « *Joe Rybicki*

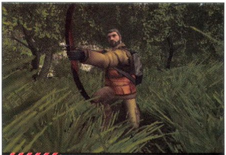
AA Neat EyeToy support; only poker game on PS2
72 Lobotomized A.I. players; annoyingly slow

Pub. Crave **Dev.** Coresoft **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [○◐●●●]

TRY INSTEAD

If you have a PC, there are plenty of poker rooms online where you can play against humans for free. They're faster and better looking than *World Championship Poker*, and you might actually learn something. Try www.ultimatebet.com or www.pokerstars.com for two of the best.



CABELA'S BIG GAME HUNTER 2005 ADVENTURES

IF KILLING DEER JUST ISN'T ENOUGH

While the killing-helpless-animals genre peaked with *Deer Hunter 2005*, this latest hunter comes with serious teeth. The teeth can be found in the mouths of the wolverines, polar bears, and assorted other angry-to-be-hunted animals that inhabit the sprawling environments in *Big Game Hunter*.

You're thinking that hunting games are a colossal bore, right? Wrong...ish. If you're tired of popping bullets in the brains of humans in crazed gunfights, or if you're the FPS deathmatch guy who gets consistently zapped right after a respawn, *Big Game Hunter* could be a relaxing way to fulfill your gaming bloodlust.

The career mode is the game's most engaging, albeit ridiculous, feature. Ridiculous because the premise involves your grandfather, a great hunter who broke his leg and therefore never fulfilled his hunting dream. His dream included killing off 65 animals—he took down 62. Instead of acting like most grandchildren and becoming a stockbroker, you're on the warpath to get the magic 65 kills. Still, the story is a great motivator to get you to work your way through the game's various regions. Instead of being dropped into random spots and killing for sport, you're on a mission.

The problem is, right out of the gate, the career mode makes things way more boring than they need to be. Instead of getting right into the killing zone, you have to chat with locals and tune up your rifle first. For hardcore hunting enthusiasts this may be an extremely thrilling enterprise, but for the rest of us it has all the excitement of sleeping on a lumpy cot. But once you get beyond that part, you can injure and maim some of Mother Nature's wonderful beasts. Yes!

If you've already taken aim at *Deer Hunter*, this is a great supplement to satisfy your need to be violent toward animals, and at a great price. But beware. Not everyone has the patience to get out of grandpappy's looming shadow. « *Todd Zuniga*

PROS A story mode, more intuitive maps, budget price, polar bears!
CONS A true snoozer for ADD gamers

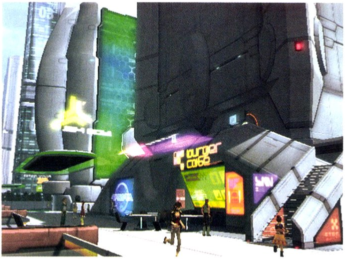
Pub. Activision **Dev.** Sand Grain Studios **ESRB** T **MSRP** $29.99

RATING [○○○●●]

ANIMAL FACTS

- A polar bear does not have white fur; the fur is actually clear.
- Wolverines look nothing like Hugh Jackman, and they're much smaller, weighing between 18 and 42 pounds. They're considered shy, playful creatures, and the oils in their fur make it frost resistant.

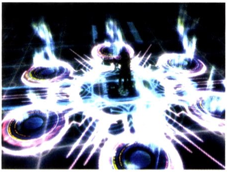
Hp 1850
Ep 46
Hp 0875
Ep 63
Hp 2188
Ep 38
Down
Zone B B
AC Fire × 02



JESUITS ARE DOING WHAT NOW?

Jenseits von Gut und Böse, translated as *Beyond* (or *The Other Side of*) *Good and Evil*, was a work published in 1886 by existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. It's the source of the well-known quote "If you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

Hp 18635
Ep 00
EC 000
Hp 13391
Ep 57
EC 000
2135
2135
PLAYER



XENOSAGA EPISODE II: JENSEITS VON GUT UND BÖSE

A QUANTUM LEAP IN THE TRUEST SENSE OF THE PHRASE

Xenosaga Episode I is space opera in its purest form, filled with numerous characters, sweeping interstellar travel, space-robot carnage, heavy use of capitalized words, and cybernetic existentialism. It demands you to hunker down and be wholly absorbed in the experience for 60-plus hours. When it's all over, you're left with a host of questions that will supposedly continue to resonate, and perhaps be resolved, within the proposed six-episode saga. In short, it is only the beginning (or, well, the first one-sixth). *Xenosaga Episode II* isn't much more. It advances the story somewhat and brings about some improvements, but it doesn't do much more than that. Rather than feel like a whole new chapter of the saga, it feels more like an extension of the previous one. Empirically, while *Episode I* takes 60 hours or so to complete (perhaps in the 35- to 40-hour range if you're a rapid RPGer), *Episode II* can be finished around the 22-hour mark, which is slightly troubling.

These 20-some hours contain both significant improvements and declinations. The battle system's alteration allows for an emphasis on boosting (having one character immediately attack after another, regardless of position in the fight order), learning enemy weaknesses, using event slots, and performing combo attacks. It's quite satisfying to figure out an enemy's vulnerability and then string together a beautiful combo move that exploits said vulnerability. Yet that elegant system is irrelevant when you're piloting the ES mechs; they only have a melee or ranged attack (one specific ES can also cast spells), meaning mech battles become affairs of occasionally tapping Square or Triangle, with minimal thought required. Finally, while the characters have unique stats and double attacks (special moves in which two characters attack at once), they all use the same simplified skill tree. This means everyone shares a common pool of spells and abilities—which translates into them playing pretty identically, their differences being story-based ones.

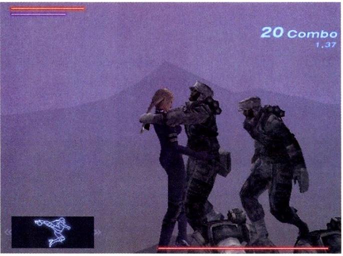
While character development in the gameplay sense has been oversimplified, character development in the story sense is hit or miss. The story focuses pretty much on Jr. for the first eight hours of the game. Sure, you see everyone else doing their thing, but the first disc is very Jr.-centric. It's not until you get to the second disc that the overarching plotline (fighting the Gnosis, searching for Zohar, dealing with the Space Pope) starts moving again—as if the team remembered that, "Oh yeah, there's this massive story that centers on humanity, not just this one artificial person!" This half is pretty good, but half of a 20-some hour game isn't enough of what fans of *Episode I* were hoping for. To be fair, you can also revisit the well-designed dungeons and embark on the Global Samaritan campaign—a series of subquests that involve puzzle-filled minigames and fetch quests—but even still, the game is under 30 hours total, which is a step back.

As an overall package, the on-foot battle system, numerous cut-scenes (which, granted, aren't quite as long as *Episode I*'s), and good dungeons make for a pretty solid RPG. But it's a solid RPG that just doesn't feel like *Xenosaga Episode II*—in the end it feels more like *Xenosaga Episode I: The Deleted Scenes*. « Thierry Nguyen

GUT Better battle system, shorter cut-scenes that also have more action in them, good dungeons
BÖSE Less than half the length of the previous game, not enough main-story development

Pub. Namco **Dev.** Monolith **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●◐○]



DEATH BY DEGREES

GET READY TO THROW A TANTRUM

Note to the videogame industry: Mapping attacks to the right analog stick isn't a good idea. Put all the crossover dribbles and jukes you want on the analog stick, but for brawling games like *Death by Degrees*, this method of control simply doesn't work. Part of the problem is the format's lack of precision, especially when you're dealing with some of the more agile enemies. In this situation, it's not uncommon to see Nina launch herself into a spectacular flurry of punches and kicks in one direction, only to hit nothing but air because the enemy moved a few inches to the left.

Another problematic part of this equation is how Nina actually moves. Instead of controlling some sort of superassassin, it feels like you're in command of an M1 tank, albeit an M1 tank in some highly revealing clothing. On top of that, Nina's evasive moves are mapped to the left analog stick, so you have to flick it to perform a cartwheel or a basic roll, and they're very hard to execute. Nina often can't decide if she wants to move regularly or perform an evasive maneuver.

One of the early boss fights revolves around your ability to execute these evasive moves, and I guarantee that you will scream an endless number of obscenities at your TV because Nina doesn't do what she's supposed to do. To its credit, the game does pick up quite a bit after that particular fight, when the *Tekken* aspect of the story line kicks in and the *Resident Evil*–style gameplay elements—which basically involve exploration and puzzle solving with the occasional search for a hidden save point—take over for the incredibly awful combat. However, the controls are still a huge problem throughout the game, and most people probably won't be able to stand the first hour or so of *Death by Degrees* anyway. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

WHAT'S IT LIKE... Imagine the worst parts of *Metal Gear Solid* combined with the worst parts of *Resident Evil*.

Pub. Namco **Dev.** Namco **ESRB** M **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●◐○○○]

OVERHEARD

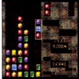
"I don't think people necessarily want something new." –Yozo Sakagami, producer, *Death By Degrees*. Dear Yozo: Yes, really, we do.

SEGA CLASSICS COLLECTION

A COLLECTION CATASTROPHE

When you look at the list of games included in *Sega Classics Collection—Columns, Space Harrier, Fantasy Zone, Monaco GP, Golden Axe, Alien Syndrome,* and *OutRun*—it seems like a pretty sweet package. That is, until you start playing some of the games and realize they've been horribly mangled and, in some cases, 3D-ified to make them appeal to a videogame audience that knows almost nothing of 2D gaming or that the era even existed.

It's pretty sad, really. *Golden Axe* looks horrendous and plays just as badly compared to the original game made in 1989. The character models are horrible and the spell effects are below PS1 quality. The same goes for *Alien Syndrome* and *OutRun*, which don't look that great, either. The car models in *OutRun* are really basic and don't mix very well with the incredibly simplistic environments. *Alien Syndrome* just looks plain terrible, but at least the core gameplay mechanics from both classics remain intact.



Some of the other games, like *Space Harrier* and *Fantasy Zone*, look OK and still play much like the originals did. *Virtua Racing*, which is the only original 3D game in the bunch, looks nearly identical to its arcade counterpart, though the constant squealing of the tires will undoubtedly drive you nuts, as will the other competitors out on the track. There are also some extra modes thrown in to make the games a little deeper, but it's an overall futile effort considering how badly butchered some of these games are.

Ultimately, you're better off finding ports of these games for the Sega Genesis or some other system, but if you're so desperate that you're willing to play these games in a less-appealing form, then *Sega Classics Collection* is the only way to go. It's just too bad that Sega didn't take more time with these games since some of them, in their original form, could still hold up after all of these years. « *Giancarlo Varanini*

NOTE TO SEGA: Please stop messing up your old games.

Pub. Sega **Dev.** Sega **ESRB** E **MSRP** $19.99

RATING [●●○○○]

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

CHAMPIONS: RET

THESE GUYS HAVE BEEN EATING THEIR WHEATIES

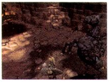
Last year's *Champions of Norrath* made a pretty big splash in the RPG community, so *Return to Arms* has a lot of fans excited.

One of the first things you'll notice about *Return to Arms* is how amazing it looks—almost everyone who stopped by my office as I was playing immediately commented on how much better the graphics are than they were in the first one. The limits to which the team has managed to stretch the PS2's capacity are pretty amazing—it's hard to believe this is the same graphics engine that was used in the first game.

This time, the linear path is structured around hubs rather than acts. You visit the hubs in sequential order to finish the story line, but at any point you can return to a previous plane. There are minor changes to the interface, some good (you can now equip from the purchase screen) and some bad (no more importing of other characters partway through a game), but the essential gameplay is the same, as the franchise continues to build on its hack-n-slash *Diablo* roots.

One thing that quickly becomes apparent is that characters (new choices include the catlike vah shir and the lizardlike iksar) need to be more well rounded than in the first game. In *Norrath* I had few problems bashing my way through the game as a beefy barbarian, but in *Return to Arms*, a ranged attack proves crucial, as early rounds pit you against bosses whose strength is great enough to kill you with one blow. Even then, you may find yourself going back to replay earlier levels to build up your character—I had to earn four additional levels before finally being able to defeat the end boss.

One of the new things Snowblind has added to *Return to Arms* is a series of minigames called medal rounds. Medal rounds are individual contests in which you can unlock new online maps, earn access to new areas, or gain additional skill points. The difficulty levels of the rounds are static, so if you're having trouble getting the champions medallion, you might want to just wait until you've leveled up higher. Challenges range from survival battles against a series of challengers to a *Pac-Man*-esque game that has you stepping on frogs while evading kobold attackers. Also new is player-versus-player combat. Pick a map and then choose to either face off against each other until one player has amassed a set number of



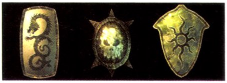
KEEP OLD FRIENDS
Are you concerned about losing the dozens of hours you may have invested in your character from *Champions of Norrath*? Don't worry, you didn't waste all that time—you can easily import your character from the first game into this one.

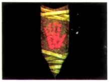
GOOD & EVIL

YOU CAN HAVE IT BOTH WAYS

Don't expect anything deep from the good and evil option—this is not a game like *KOTOR* or *Fable* where your moral decisions affect your character's outcome. Both sides run around bashing things—essentially the only difference between the two comes during the cut-scenes, so your decision might as well be made based on whether you prefer blondes (good Firiona Vie) or brunettes (evil Natasla).

However, the good and evil paths do mean that you have two story lines wrapped up in one game. Once you've completed the game for the first time, you can take that same character back through and play on the other side, giving you different challenges and environments. It's a nice perk for people who may have grown attached to their characters. (I heart Cûddles!!!)





URN TO ARMS

wins or battle cooperatively against a series of enemies for as long as you can stay alive.

One of the common complaints about the last game was the online experience. Framerates were fairly slow, and the process you needed to go through to actually get online was a bit clunky. Though *Return to Arms* was prelaunch when I played it (meaning the servers were not even close to being full), the online play experience seemed a great deal smoother and faster than it was in *Norrath*. More important, a lot of the start-up options have been streamlined, making it easier to jump in and play. *Return to Arms* allows you to import a character from your memory card, or you can opt to develop a server-side character instead.

My only complaint with the game is that the plot consists of more of the traditional melodramatic *EverQuest* lore, which is pretty lame compared with some of the interesting story lines that have shown up in other recent RPGs. But as most of us play these games for the bashing rather than the story, it's a minor quibble, and fans of the series should be more than pleased. « *Dana Jongewaard*

+25 VALOR More bashing goodness, new quick modes, streamlined online play
-5 DORKITUDE Does anyone really care about the fate of the *EverQuest* universe?

Pub. Sony Online Entertainment **Dev.** Snowblind **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

RATING [●●●●◐]

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